



ACADEMY *of the* PEOPLE

Research group
Image in Context with
Jonas Staal and Younes Bouadi

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COLOPHON

Hanze University of Applied
Sciences Groningen
Centre of Applied Research and
Innovation Art & Society
Research group Image in Context,
Minerva Art Academy

Professor of Image in Context:

Dr. Anke Coumans
(a.c.m.coumans@pl.hanze.nl)

Minerva Art Academy

Praediniussingel 59
9711 AG Groningen
[www.hanzeuniversity.eu/
artandsociety](http://www.hanzeuniversity.eu/artandsociety)
[www.hanzegroningen.eu/
imageincontext](http://www.hanzegroningen.eu/imageincontext)

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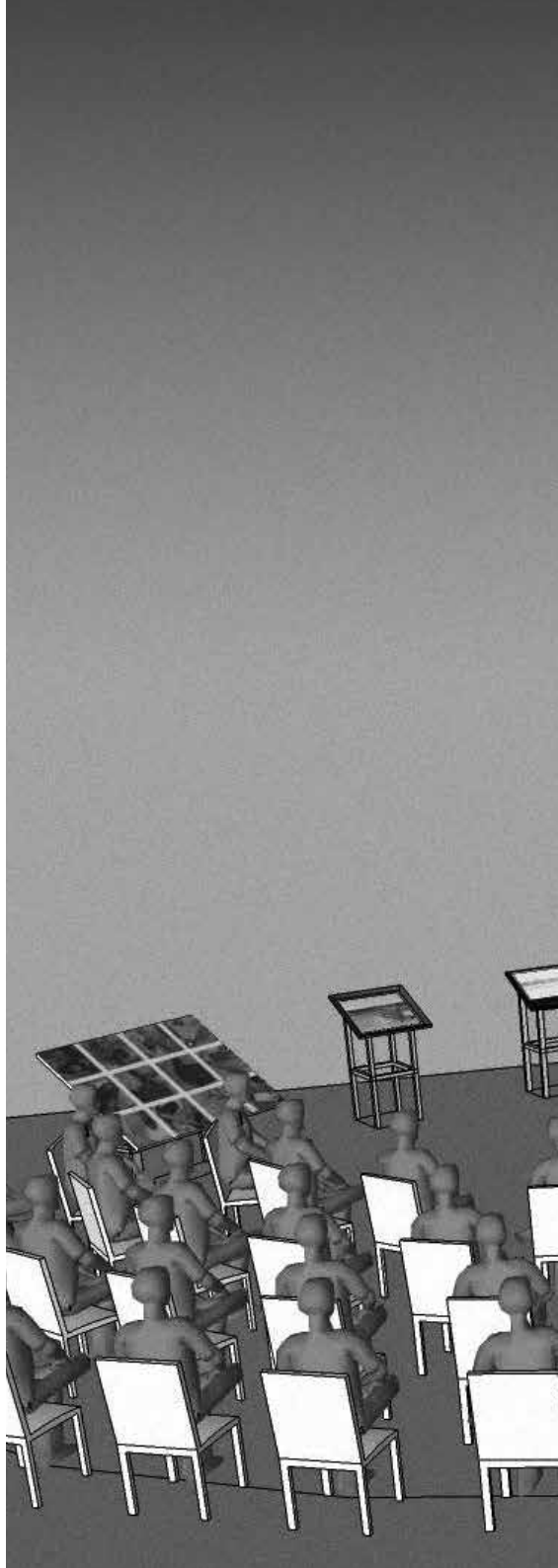
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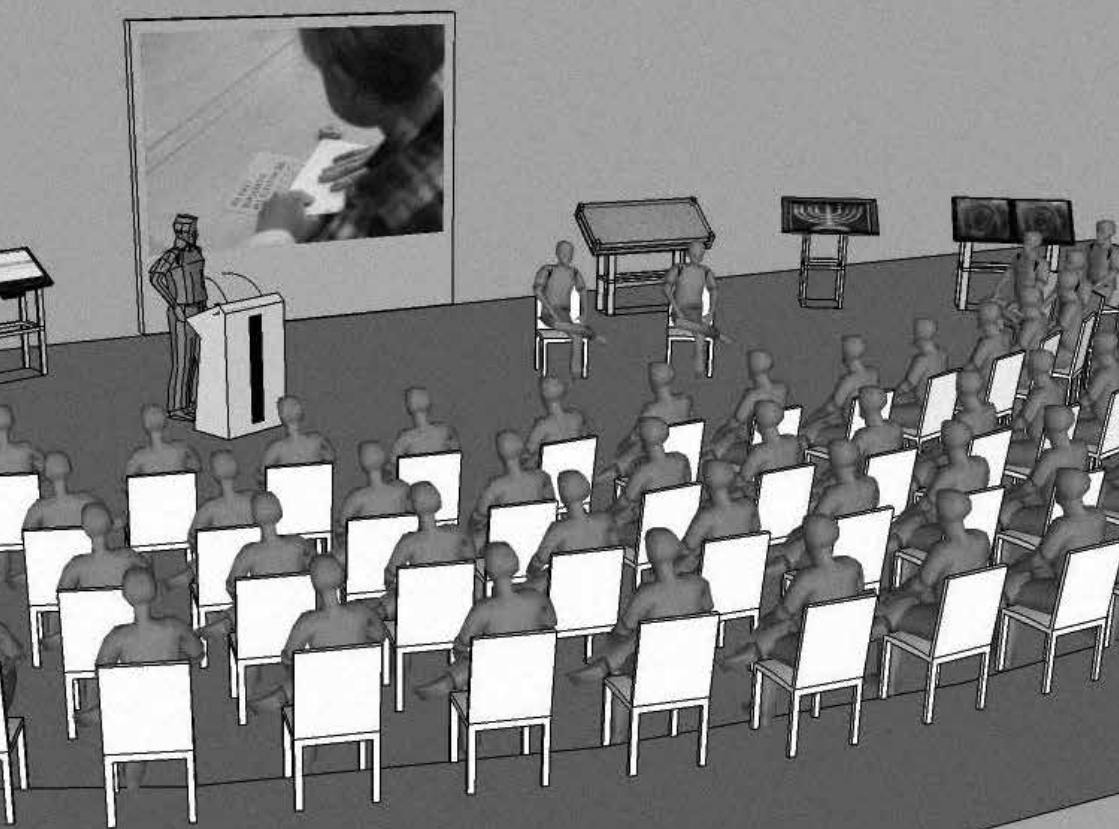
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in Context



JONAS STAAL

Academy of the People is a project which ran from December 2012 to June 2013, in which students from Minerva Art Academy in Groningen developed critical site-specific artworks in the social environments of their research interests: in primary schools, religious centres and even police stations. In each of these environments, our understanding of art changes. This shows us that the range of possible art worlds is equal to the will of the artists to create them.





*‘Some students
**REALLY THREW
THEMSELVES TO THE
LIONS** and I thought that
was very courageous’*

SUE-AN VAN DER ZIJPP

has been a curator of modern art at the Groninger Museum since 1999. As such, she is responsible for organising exhibitions, deciding on the concept and the setup of the exhibitions and the objects that are being displayed.

What exactly was your role in the Academy of the People project?

I was involved in the project itself, be it in a very modest way. And in addition, my role was to facilitate the students. Facilitating in the sense that we made a space available in the museum and supervised the students in practical terms. More detailed supervision took place in the conversations we had with Minerva Art Academy about how we were going to exhibit the project; how we were going to set it up. The museum came up with the idea of organising a presentation in the great hall of the Groninger Museum, like a kind of talk show. We thought it would be a nice idea to do it like this, because the subject itself was also the outside world, and we thought we might attract a wider audience this way.

And did that succeed?

The evening was a success and there were certainly a lot of people. But I don't know whether there were many people from outside the general 'art audience' so to

speak. We had the Minerva students, their relatives and friends and, of course, the partner institutions and the people who came with them. So that really filled up the auditorium.

As the institution of the Groninger Museum your role was, of course, slightly different. What was your assignment exactly?

It was quite comprehensive, actually. Basically, the assignment was: do you want to work together? The subject was 'art outside the institutional boundaries', and the grand finale would be that the artworks would be displayed in the Groninger Museum. In which our role was primarily a practical one. The students also had to learn how to deal with an institution, for example. They had to stick to their appointments, deliver their materials on time, that kind of thing. For my part, I ensured that the project was carried out in a practical way, that materials were handed in on time, that a space was available.

Some participants would have liked to see their works displayed in one of the official exhibition rooms. Would that have been an option?

The exhibition rooms and the way we organise them have been booked years in advance. So with a project such as this, which happens on a much shorter term, it wouldn't have been possible.

Has this project changed your opinion about art, that you can change things with art?

Yes and no. I don't think that you can change things with art in a very immediate way, but that the process is a much more subtle one. Because art is about imagination and ambiguity, it can be the foundation for a different way of looking, thinking and acting. I know that in one of his artworks Jonas Staal allowed activists to speak, and I have no doubt that his projects can have a great impact. But I do wonder how great this impact is outside the circle of those immediately involved. The arts alone will not topple regimes any time soon, for example. As I said, I think art works in much more subtle ways.

What do you think the impact of the final evening of Academy of the People has been?

It was a good evening with a good atmosphere. My impression was that people enjoyed it. And it was quite diverse and animated as well. I also thought it was quite moving to see what it was like for the students. In their contact with the outside world some of them discovered that 'ordinary people' need them like they need a hole in the head. When you're at the art academy, of course, you're in a kind of art bubble. You can experiment to your heart's content and much is forgiven. But if you step outside these safe walls and get in touch with the world outside, you discover that to

a lot of people art is quite inaccessible; that a lot of people's attitude is one of 'I don't understand it' or 'I don't like it'. This may have to do with fear, but it is still something they will come across. Quite a few students discovered that they would have to work very hard to make themselves and their work relevant. For some of them this project was a real eye-opener in that sense. And I saw how during the evening they really tried to step out of their comfort zone and make contact, and I found that really quite moving.

Looking back, what do you think the value of the project was?

I do think that it brought the students a lot. For them it was really about stepping out of the box and explaining yourself. And it concerned very existential questions as well, such as, why do I do this? And for whom am I doing it? I thought the students were really courageous. Because some projects went quite far, like the girl who became a Muslim, I thought that was really quite unexpected. And also the guy who exhibited his stolen goods at the police station. That was quite compromising and also very political, because in a certain sense, of course, it was very subversive work. And it also produced some fierce reactions I understood later, especially from within the police organisation itself. In that sense the students really stepped outside the safe walls of the art academy and threw themselves to the lions. And I thought that was quite courageous.

Did it have any impact on your own development?

For me as a curator of modern art for the museum it was certainly an interesting project. We work for the public as well, of course, and in a way we are also embedded in our own well-known environment. It can be a good thing to hear how people from different sectors look at art.



Interview with **David Stroband**, teacher at Minerva Art Academy and moderator of the evening

'Academy of the people shows **A RICH PALETTE OF** **RELATIONSHIPS** *which* *can be brought about by the* *arts'*

To conclude the Academy of the People project a special evening was organised to which all participants and partner institutions were invited. The evening gave them the opportunity to talk about what they had come across, exchange experiences and look back. David Stroband, theory teacher in the department of Fine Arts & Design at Minerva Art Academy, was chairman of the evening. The fact that he was not involved in the project phase of Academy of the People, gave David Stroband the opportunity to be the voice of impartiality at this concluding evening. It was his job to steer the conversations in the right direction.

Did you know beforehand how you wanted to approach this evening?

My assignment was to ask the students about the outcomes of the project and to help them present these. So in preparation, I spoke to the students and with Jonas Staal a few days before.

What was it that most struck you about this project?

I really enjoyed seeing how the students started thinking outside the box, and that happened really quite quickly. They really had to step outside their own boundaries. That was an essential part of the project; you had to relate to society. Nothing new in itself, such experiments have often been done, but always inside the safe walls of

Minerva Art Academy, and this project required an extra step. Minerva has a more outward focus now than it did before, and Academy of the People certainly stimulated that attitude. The relationship with society has become far more integrated into the curriculum, also because of the research groups Minerva now has. Students really have to learn how to start thinking and working from different perspectives.

What did you think of the chosen strategies, and was there a project that caught your special attention?

I thought they were inspiring. When I look back, I particularly see the police station and the guy who made an artwork from stolen goods, and also the girl who became a Muslim. That was perhaps the most radical choice, making yourself the subject of the project. For me those choices had a lot to do with courage. And I don't want to say that they had my particular preference, but they certainly stood out.

What do you think the partner institutions thought of the exchange? Did you get any reactions, or notice anything in particular?

It's hard to say specifically, but I got the impression they thought it was inspiring. I had discussions with everyone, of course, also with the partners, and it became clear that it also gave them a different perspective on their own profession.

What do you consider to be the value of such a project?

You step out of your comfort zone and this gives you a different way of looking at your own work and also at your own position. As far as that goes, Jonas Staal was the right person to show the students what art can be. I don't know that I would say he is bringing about new developments in the arts, but his focus is very explicit.

In earlier projects, for example the project in which he gives people who are labelled as 'terrorists' the opportunity to speak, is perceived as new, but his idea that you need another vision to look at the world is very accepted in the arts. The 'counter thinking' as it were, and he did not invent this. And the combination of politics and arts is not very new either, but what is new is the way he does it, making use of new media and globalisation. With this, he does accentuate new elements. The way I see it, he brings outcasts in society together. These so-called 'terrorists' are people who view society from a different perspective, a non-established perspective you could say. And that is something artists do as well, be it in a very different way. But they are capable of moving in society and placing themselves on the outskirts a little as well. So in a way this is what they have in common with the 'terrorists' - though in a different way. Jonas Staal sees similarities in the 'other' positions they take up, and these are the things that he brings together.

Has this project changed your ideas about art or about what you can bring about with art?

As a teacher of Fine Arts & Design, I have to say that for me this wasn't the case so much. I certainly thought it was a very interesting project, and I especially enjoyed seeing how the students dealt with it and did an about-turn. But it didn't bring me a great deal of news. I thought it was a good thing for our students to come into contact with a new social role. And for themselves it was interesting to see what place their work takes up in society, and which forces they encounter in the process. What was quite wonderful was that Academy of the People was so rich in terms of its difference in perspectives, and also the different relationships which can be brought about with art. A rich palette, which I thought was very valuable.

Art exchange between Janpier Brands,
Hugo Engwerda and ICT company Ordina

BIG BROTHER AND THE INTROVERTED WORLD OF THE ARTS

*“The collaboration and exchange
with someone like Jonas Staal
has a great added value.”*







Interview with **Janpier Brands** and **Hugo Engwerda**,
Master Art Education students and teachers at Minerva
Academy for Pop Culture

The **MAGIC WORLD** *of* **ICT and THE REVUE**

Wherever you end up for an art project such as this, the nature and setup of Academy of the People will ensure that you come across social problems, which you have to examine from all sides. This is what Janpier Brands and Hugo Engwerda, both teachers at Minerva Academy for Pop Culture, experienced in their art exchange with the ICT company Ordina. And then the question is, what are you going to do with these problems and how? Build bridges or polarise? Janpier and Hugo put together a revue, with the help of students from Minerva Academy for Pop Culture. A revue in the way a revue is intended, a show with singing and dancing, alternated with sketches which give an impression of what Ordina does. The discussions at the Groninger Museum explained in which social playing field the art exchange took place.

Why did you choose to work with Ordina?

Janpier: Our aim was to bring about an art exchange with an organisation you would not ordinarily work together with. Based on this we decided on the middle management of a company from the ICT sector.

What kind of art exchange did you have in mind and how did the choice for this exchange develop?

Hugo: Even though people were enthusiastic about working together, there was initially some confusion about the exchange, because the idea was taken very literally. They did have art, but these were expensive pieces

and the insurance might be an issue.

Janpier: This is why we suggested meeting first and to then decide whether we could come up with ideas about art, which we could both support. We arrived at the idea that the creative strategies used for the development of ICT products is very closely linked to the concept of making art.

What kind of ICT products does the company make and what was it that appealed to you about the way they are produced?

Hugo: A good example is the crowd management system developed by Ordina.

This software registers crowd movements during manifestations based on digital tracks or data.

Janpier: Using these, they can make predictions about movements. At the time of Academy of the People this was very topical, considering the discussions about Project X in Haren and Big Data.

Hugo: Visually, it is also very attractive to see how they register these movements with a heat map. The system was developed by a 'hacking' department in the company. It also touches upon social themes and the considerations people make in this, such as issues pertaining to security and the privacy of data.

What interest did Ordina have in the art exchange, do you think?

Hugo: Their crowd management system would be presented at the Groninger Museum. Ordina also saw opportunities because of the collaboration with the museum and the art academy.

Janpier: And part of the deal was, of course, that we would bring art into the Ordina organisation. We decided to organise a revue, a theatre performance with music and entertainment by students who performed on stage. The revue was presented by a trio, who gave an impression of Ordina through sketches. There were also songs, dance and a show with an act where students played zombie mayors, the Mayors of Torhart.

What was the importance of this project for your own development?

Janpier: It brought me a lot personally. As a student, but also as a teacher at Minerva Academy for Pop Culture. One of the reasons for this is working with Jonas Staal, who I had been following for a while. I gained a lot of new information during the meetings with him. This rich input also resulted in good output.

Hugo: I agree with that wholeheartedly. The collaboration and exchange with someone like that has a great added value.

Janpier: And how can we make sure that this (social) critical way of working can be incorporated in our own teaching practice? A project like this takes you outside the academy walls quite a lot, which works really well, even if it remains a search.

Your role of being a student on the one hand and a teacher on the other has been rather interwoven in this project. Wasn't that difficult?

Janpier: As we went along in the project, the idea came to us to take part as students. You are part of a learning community. We consider the collaboration with the students, even if we are also their teachers, as a partnership in a world that is new to both parties.

Has Academy of the People influenced your way of working and, if so, how?

Janpier: What is important in a project such as this is the experience of having an adventure. You cannot control everything.

Hugo: Coincidence plays an important part. In a way, it is rather like 'playing outside'. And that is how learning really works.

Has the project influenced your ideas about what art can mean?

Janpier: What struck me is that the art world as a whole is still very introverted. They appear not to be looking for partnerships in the outside world, while there are plenty of examples of similar collaborations. What can we mean to each other and how can we keep our own critical point of view while working together? As artists we can use our artistic skills in this, in order to realise alternatives for how systems function. Sometimes we can do this by polarising, and sometimes we can do this by building bridges.



Interview with **Patrick van Oosten** and **Marga van Nes**,
Management Consultant and the Manager of Facility
Management of the ICT company Ordina

The aesthetics **of CROWD MANAGEMENT** *and CYBER-ATTACKS*

Almost everyone has a smartphone and we all like information and internet services to be available any-time and any-place. At the same time quite a lot of people are worried about what this means for our privacy. What are the risks of Big Data and ICT services in the Cloud? Or do these outweigh the advantages? And what does this have to do with art? These were the questions Janpier Brands and Hugo Engwerda came across when they chose to enter into an art exchange for Academy of the People with ICT company Ordina. They worked closely together with management consultant Patrick van Oosten and Marga van Ness from Facility Management.

Why did you participate in Academy of the People?

Patrick: For me personally, it was my interest in innovation. That was the starting point for me. You can learn a lot from subcultures, so also from those in the art world. We were open to an exchange, but at first it was hard to imagine what the idea was exactly.

Marga: Our art largely hangs in the head office in Nieuwegein, and an exchange also brings about issues of insurance, of course.

Eventually the art exchange turned out to be quite different to what you had expected. What exactly was your part in the art exchange?

Patrick: At first we talked with people from the art academy, Janpier Brands and Hugo Engwerda, to explore what our options were. They rather liked the idea of doing something with the system we developed

for crowd management, Pulse. This system registers crowds on the mobile network and maps mobile traffic and the intensity of it during events, but also the routes people walk. Think for example of the coronation day. The system can also be used to map social media traffic. The use of such a system also touches upon social questions, privacy of data, for example. And ICT is all around us, so how far can you go in this? Of course, we do not decide what art is, but because of the creative processes and the social issues that are involved, we thought we might have something to offer. And Hugo and Janpier thought so too. Moreover, they also really liked the images the system generates.

Can you give an example?

Patrick: The system can make heat maps in which, for example, it registers 112 calls over a longer period of time. For the employment and organisation of emergency services,

this is very relevant information. The system can also map cyber-attacks, where they come from and how they are deflected. The generated images look very good from a visual perspective, and Janpier and Hugo found them intriguing. This is why we showed them at the Groninger Museum, with our explanation. What makes it interesting is the connectedness with social issues. In the museum questions were asked about privacy, questions which, by the way, are also asked in our own company. It is not at all our intention to be Big Brother.

What did you receive as part of the exchange?

Patrick: A variety show during our end of year party. There were performances from bands, a break-dancer, a DJ, singers. And an object was made with drip-paint.

Marga: This object is currently at our branch in Apeldoorn. The idea is that this object will travel through Ordina and will be exhibited for a time in each branch of the company. People were very enthusiastic in the head office in Nieuwegein. They quite liked the project there.

What did the project bring you?

Patrick: The setup of our annual party was great, and of course that is a very tangible outcome. But the trajectory towards it was very instructive for both parties. We are very much used to project management and structure, and less to improvisation. These are differences in culture. But especially in the development phase of an idea, it is very important that there is space for improvisation and to make detours when necessary. You see this with entrepreneurs, but also with artists. It convinced me of the importance of this freer way of working, which can work very well in our sector and in certain other situations. In the world of software development you see that there is also a movement towards a so-called

‘agile’ (more flexible) approach, rather than the more static process (programme of requirements, test phases, etc.). The ‘scrum’ methodology for example, works with a team which consists of different disciplines, and the outcome is not entirely certain from the start. I personally very much prefer this way of innovating, or business development as we call it. Academy of the People has confirmed my convictions that stepping outside the well-trodden paths can lead to good things.

Has it changed your ideas about art?

Patrick: Aesthetics are a matter of taste. A work of art can move you or not. But the idea of bringing art closer to people and looking for collaborations as was done in Academy of the People is a wonderful and a good thing I think. But I do have one small point of criticism. I noticed that during the symposium in the museum some of the people, not the ones we worked with by the way, talked about art in a very academic way. If art should not be elitist and if you want to bring art closer to the people, then you should also be able to hear this in the language with which people speak about art. Certainly in a project like Academy of the People.

What do you think collaboration with your company brought the students?

Marga: I think that students from the art academy could learn a lot from our more business-like way of working. As far as that goes they have been able to take a peek behind the scenes. During the project we also talked about a possible follow-up in which we could elaborate on this. Managing a project, whether it is an exhibition or an event, or the development of a product, always requires planning and monitoring of the process. Especially when more people are involved. I think that in that respect these kinds of meetings can be very helpful for students.

THE POLITICS OF CHOOSING A WORK OF ART

*“I truly believe art is
better when it is conceived
and made by more than
a single mind.”*







Interview with **Irene Sanchez**, Fine Arts student
at Minerva Art Academy

'I'm proud we created **A REALLY DEMOCRATIC ELECTION** *in the school'*

What was the exchange you made as part of the project?

I've always been interested in the role art and the artist can play in the field of education. That's the reason I chose to do my exchange with a primary school. I decided that the kids should give me a piece of art from the school for the exhibition, and in exchange I would give them a piece of work made by me. In this particular case, my work would be a performance in which the whole class would choose, in a democratic way, the piece of art for their school which would be part of the final exhibition at the Groninger Museum. That's how we created the project "My first democratic art election".

How would you describe your role in this exchange?

This is not an easy question to answer, since one of the objectives of the project was to explore the boundaries between art and education: the roles of the teacher and the artist. What are the differences? What are the similarities? The performance was conceived as a piece of art, but beyond that, it was an act of education in itself. I was the conductor, the director of the election: I explained the rules of a democratic election to the kids, and I guided them through the process.

They had to form groups and decide together which piece they would propose for the exchange, trying to convince the rest as to why that special work should be in the museum. Then they all voted individually, and very seriously, and I counted the votes. It was an extremely serious ritual and the kids understood that from the very first moment. It was an experience of collectivity; I was an artist, a teacher and after all, a citizen. That mixture of personalities and concepts turned the project into something very rare and special.

Can you say something about the strategy you chose for the exchange?

I wanted the kids to have a true experience of politics. Politics is part of everything we do, also with art. I wanted them to participate in it, and especially, I wanted us all to be part of it in a collective way. I guided the kids to create democracy. I never meant to be a leader, the kids made the process by themselves, and sometimes I felt I was only an observer. It was amazing to see that a collective and non-hierarchical process was possible with a very simple thing: choosing a piece of art. I chose to be part of the group as an educator, using art tools, creativity and collaborative work,

and have an experience in a determinate context. Then the lines between the professions disappear.

What does the project Academy of the People mean to you? At the time and now when you look back on it? How has it influenced your artistic practice?

I was desperately looking for an opportunity to be part of something like Academy of the People. It was a very good exercise for the kind of group thinking and discussion and collaborative processes that have attracted me since I started studying art. I don't feel comfortable in solitary creation, the well-known image of the artist in her studio. I truly believe art is better when it is conceived and made by more than a single mind. That's what I felt at the time, and I still think that it happened that way, and that we got a very interesting result. Since the project, I've continued working in that way, and now I'm taking part in some artistic residencies that explore this way of creation.

Has it changed or influenced your opinion about art or about what art can achieve?

Art is everywhere. It has many different shapes and forms. It connects with so many parts of society and overall it does not belong to any concrete social group. That's what I learnt doing Academy of the People, because I lived it. What we achieved was to put that idea on the table, to show that there should not be any limits. Art definitely has to go out of the museum, or in other words, the museum has to go out and find art.

What was the cooperation with the partner organisation like? How do you think they looked upon the exchange? What is this based on?

In my case, I feel I had a lot of freedom. I was replacing the teacher during the days

of the project, and I think that was interesting, to be the real teacher. It was necessary that there was no interruption or inclusion from any representative from the school, because I only wanted the kids to be part of the elections, and I needed a clean environment for the process to be free. Of course, the teacher was kind and I'm grateful to her for not impeding on my idea. I think she really understood the nature of the project, and she decided to stay away.

Have you had any reactions from the representatives of the organisation, during the project or afterwards?

I don't think the school, as an organisation, was aware of the relevance of Academy of the People. They didn't show too much interest in what we were doing and, as I said, that was an advantage for me, but they also didn't put any obstacles in my way. For example, in lending me the piece to show in the museum. In the end, I felt it was a little bit of a secret - between me and the kids that will last forever, I hope.

What is the value of the project to you as an artist?

I was able to experiment with two of my biggest interests, which are contemporary practices and education. It was a unique opportunity to do it the way I wanted. And to see the other projects that the other artists made on the same basis was delightful. It will be, without any doubt, a reference project in my personal career.

Are there any other interesting organisations you would want to work with in a similar way?

I would like to continue this way, inside institutions for education. I would like to compare schools in different parts of the world, for example, or to see how this first democratic art election would go if it took place at a high school, or at a university.

Art exchange between Ferdi Speelman
and the Groninger police station

THE EXHIBITION THAT FINALLY BROUGHT REDEMPTION TO ITS MAKER

*“I noticed that you have to deal
with many problems if you make
an artwork of this type.”*





Interview with **Ferdi Speelman**, Fine Arts student
at Minerva Art Academy



THE THIEF, *the confession* AND THE ART

For Ferdi Speelman as a fourth-year Fine Arts student right before his final exams, it was a really busy period, but he really wanted to participate in the Academy of the People project. Not least because of the involvement of Jonas Staal in the project. What really appeals to Ferdi is the approach of Staal's art, which goes much further than the purely aesthetical and has themes which touch upon the core of society. An artist with balls and sincere intentions, according to Ferdi.

You chose an art exchange with the Groninger police station. Why?

I thought it might be an organisation with very different points of view. Police officers work with rules, with guarding boundaries. We as artists are often exploring boundaries, trying to stretch them and sometimes cross them.

How did this collaboration go and what was needed to arrive at an art exchange?

I was in touch with someone who works in the archives, who was responsible for the police's art collection. The communication went very well, I was given plenty of cooperation for the organisation of the exhibition. The works of art generally exhibited at the police station always have a connection with the police. Part of the exchange was that police artworks would hang in the Groninger Museum. The words Groninger Museum have a magic ring to them, I discovered. Then all doors open and everyone wants to work with you!

What was your part in the exchange?

I wanted to make an artwork myself as well, which had a connection with the police. I chose an installation with objects I had stolen myself. This varied from a V&D peppermill to a digital camera.

The stolen goods, by the way, had never been stolen from persons, but always from large companies who are insured against theft. I had displayed everything on a table in the hallway of the police station, with numbers alongside the objects and a list of descriptions. You see that kind of thing in police shows such as CSI or Baantjer. In the case of the peppermill, for example, it said: 3. Peppermill: V&D, 2006. And around it I had put that red and white police tape.

How did this exhibition go down in the lion's den?

I was quite nervous about it beforehand, because the thefts had not yet been revealed. I also wrote an accompanying text, which was next to the stolen goods. A kind of confession with an explanation of my motives. But nothing happened.

But weren't you in prison for a short time?

Yes, as part of the exchange I made myself undergo a symbolical punishment. I spent about half a day in prison. It was quite tricky to realise, because the cells were full the whole time. When a place became available, I was allowed in but I had to get out as soon as someone really needed to be put in the cell.

How did the staff respond, or the visitors of the police station, to the exhibition?

My approach of exhibiting the stolen goods with numbers and a list led to recognition among the police officers. But although I also put a form on the table through which people could respond, there were not many reactions. Some were negative. Those came from people who did not recognise any art in it.

How would you describe your approach to this project, what was your role and strategy?

I tried to make something that tied in with the organisation and that, in particular, was

also socially relevant, to make people think. But at the same time, I also thought about the meaning the project had for me at that particular time, what my way of dealing with this project would bring me. That is also why I wanted the experience of being locked up, as an addition to the exhibition in the police station. For me, this has become a theme: what can art bring me, and why do I do what I do?

So, what was the meaning of the project for you then?

Apart from it being an interesting experience, I also graduated with this project. I noticed that you have to deal with many problems if you make an artwork of this type. People asked me questions I had not always considered well enough beforehand, and so could not always answer immediately. This taught me that these type of artworks have more layers, not just for yourself but also for others, for the spectator.

And now, a while later, how do you look back on the project?

For students, a project such as Academy of the People is an opportunity to take a step into the outside world. It taught me that our ideas about art are not definitive. As artists we do not possess the exclusive rights to art. With a project such as this you make a bridge between the arts and non-artists. I found the experience so important for myself that I also participated in another one of Jonas Staal's projects during the past year, The New World Academy in Utrecht. My own works were going more in that direction as well and I find the project and its contents very inspiring. In this last project, my role was especially a practical one, but this teaches you quite a lot. Artists started up conversations with certain other parties, the Pirate Party in our case. Through exchange we developed a format for lectures that include the aspect of participation.



Interview with **Jan Hollander**, Police Station Groningen

CONFRONTING ≥ *connecting?*

The police's mission is: The police is always vigilant and of service to the values of the constitutional state. This mission is carried out by the police – by, depending on the situation, protecting when they are asked or not asked to, to set boundaries or to reinforce these. Core values are: courage, reliability, connectivity and incorruptibility. But there's room for art in the police force as well. And the role art plays seems to tie in especially with the third core value: connecting. For a few years now it has been possible for visitors to the police station in the centre of Groningen to see exhibitions, but they are open to interested citizens as well. Ferdi Speelman, a fourth-year Fine Arts student at Minerva Art Academy, placed an installation in the station which takes this notion of connecting that little bit further.

Art and the police, how do these two relate to each other?

The art you can see here at the police station is from a changing exhibition. There is always art here at the station. Since we started organising art exhibitions a few years ago we have never had an empty space. The role art plays here is to make the station more accessible, more inviting. You can always walk in to see an exhibition, whether it's a late night shopping evening or, in a manner of speaking, after you've been out at night. The flyers for the exhibition always mention that the police station is open twenty-four hours a day.

What was your role in the art exchange for Academy of the People?

I was the contact person for Ferdi, because of my job as exhibition organiser. His idea

about how to approach the exchange by building an installation in the station was new to me. I was open to the idea and was very curious about what it is young artists do these days. So I helped him with the organisation and I also arranged for him that he could sit in a cell for a few hours. The idea was for him to be there for an indefinite time, but since it got very busy, he had to make room for 'another' detainee.

Ferdi's installation of a table with objects he had stolen himself inside a police station was rather provocative. How did the police respond?

Ferdi had made forms through which people could react and about fifteen of them were handed in, primarily by staff. They were largely negative reactions. The idea did not sit well with some colleagues. In that sense, he did succeed in stirring things up by choosing this idea. The idea and his defence for the thefts reminded me very much of the book 'El Lute' from the seventies in which a boy from the slums of Spain goes from being a petty thief to becoming a hardened criminal through sheer poverty. In prison he learns to read, starts his studies and later on he writes this book. How traumatic can a life be if you are forced to make certain choices through poverty? It also ties in with what that priest (Muskens) said, namely that stealing bread is okay if you are hungry and it allows you to survive. Ferdi's project made this theme very concrete.

So Ferdi's work stirred some things up in the organisation?

Well, perhaps on a very small scale. The period the exhibition lasted was short, and once it had been cleared away everyone went back to business as usual. If you were looking for a bigger effect, you would have to pay more attention to it, explain more about it perhaps or have a discussion, give it more publicity.

Was there any understanding?

With the explanation right there, there was understanding. For example, it took me quite a bit of trouble getting Ferdi into a cell. But after I explained, my colleagues understood and gave us all their support. After that he was searched according to procedure and neatly locked away. Unfortunately for Ferdi, only for a few hours.

What did the police put into the art exchange, what went to the Groninger Museum?

I'm a painter myself and I also had an exhibition at the police station. So I chose for one of my own paintings to go to the museum. When do you get an opportunity like that?! A still life of a weathered, red plastic chair on the beach of Schiermonnikoog. Unfortunately, I didn't see it myself when it hung in the museum, because I was ill on the day the symposium was held in the Groninger Museum.

How do you look back on this art exchange?

The exciting thing about this exchange was perhaps the confrontation between two worlds. That of the police, an organisation which enforces and has to be neutral, and the world of artists in which there is a lot of room for expression and different meanings, no matter how challenging these may be.

So a project like this would bear repeating as far as the police is concerned?

As far as I'm concerned, it would. But there are certain limits regarding themes and that especially has to do with the visitors. If people come in here for example to report abuse, then they should not have to walk past artworks which depict violence. And this applies to sex as well. For those people, it is neither the right place nor the right time at such a moment.



CONCLUDING MEETING OF THE *Academy of the People* PROJECT

SUE-AN VAN DER ZIJPP

I would like to welcome everyone to the Groninger Museum tonight for the presentation of Academy of the People. My name is Sue-an van der Zijpp. I am a curator of modern art. I create exhibitions, and not long ago I was contacted by Jonas Staal and Anke Coumans with the question of whether the Groninger Museum would be interested in collaborating in the presentation of this project. What does this entail? A number of Minerva Art Academy students took part in an exchange project, which means that they visited a number of institutions, social institutions such as the police station, schools, or a synagogue and that they offered their own work there and took away work from the institution, collected this, and around us we now see a presentation of these works. This is a super exclusive and very temporary exhibition, we could say, of works which otherwise would never be seen together in this arrangement. So, I would say, enjoy it while you can, because tomorrow it really won't be here. We also have one of the most popular works - it's over there, Ikea's rose. I don't know if you know it, but it is one of the most popular works of all time. So popular and I can add that it is one of the works which would not normally be seen between the walls of a museum. But what is important here is that these works come from worlds which you would not normally associate with art.

A police station, a prison, an office. And these really are worlds in which there is a lot of art, but it functions in a very different way there than it does in a museum. Just how different is something we will probably be discussing tonight. And at the same time, they are a kind of quiet art worlds, as Jonas says. In his announcement he also says that they are images in which all kinds of art can be seen, it is represented everywhere. I would say it is just below the boundary of art with a capital 'A', in a way, but in a sense it proves even more that the issue is that art is everywhere, but also that art belongs to everyone. So the idea that art is only for a small elite is no more than a political lie, according to Rene Boomkens who teaches at University of Groningen. There are eight million people who work with some kind of form of amateur art on a daily basis and, he says, then all of a sudden you are dealing with a very large elite. So the idea that art is only a left-wing hobby, which can be dismissed and cut out of the budget based on that argument, is based on something we can call a lie. Be that as it may, about this evening, about the how and what of this project, Anke Coumans and Jonas Staal will tell us a lot more. Also speaking will be the representatives of the various institutions and their students, and this will happen under the supervision of teacher David Strobband. I wish you a very inspiring evening.



ANKE COUMANS

Again, a very good evening to you all. My name is Anke Coumans, as you have just heard. I am the professor of the research group Image in Context of the Centre of Applied Research and Innovation Art & Society at Minerva Art Academy. It is with great pleasure that I will give a brief introduction this evening on the artistic research project Academy of the People. The Academy of the People project originated from a workshop programme by visual artist Jonas Staal and producer Younes Bouardi, both present here tonight. A workshop programme in which the relationship between art and propaganda will be made clear. In his introduction, Jonas will tell us more about this.



The concept of Academy of the People was developed based on these workshops by artists from Minerva Art Academy with whom they worked during the past year. These artists come from the context of an educational institution, and as journalists they undertook active research into the meaning of art in a different context than the context of the art academy. For this, they looked for representatives in different worlds: the world of a large retail business, the world of religion, the world of education, the world of policing, the world of science, and the world of ICT. As artists they used the concept of art exchange for their research. The art exchange can be considered an interventionist method, developed by them, which brings about interaction leading to a process of new mutual insights.

Put more simply: by introducing the idea of an art exchange, the conversation was started, the dialogue opened from a clear objective. An exchange was going to take place. At its core the exchange would look as follows:

something will be taken away which is called art and something will be placed back which is also called art. In philosophical terms you might call this deterritorialization and reterritorialization. In other words: take something away and put something else in its place. This double action calls for a kind of reorientation.

In our case, it is the start of a discussion about the position of art in a certain environment.

Meaning, value and the procedures around art exchange were the subjects of conversation. For the exchange we asked for the cooperation of the museum, through the person of Sue-an van der Zijpp, who luckily agreed to this. The object which was taken away, after discussion, was transported to the museum where it was given a new context, which could also give the work itself new meaning. A painting in a hospital, after all, is not quite the same thing as a painting in a museum. The exchange does not only mean a transportation of the artworks, but also the placing of art in a different context. Which illustrates how art is determined by the context in which it is placed. Tonight we will be discussing the consequences of this placement. What does the context of the Groninger Museum mean for the artworks? Why is it so beneficial for the participating institutions that their work is now present in this temple of art? The artists then had to think about which artwork they would be placing in return. What artwork would you, as an artist, place in a police station? In a synagogue? In an international school? But also, how would you place an artwork in, for instance, Ikea? These different environments made the artists face the question of which art to place where, but also of how it should be placed. This exchange led to exciting actions and also to exciting artworks, as will be presented here later in the interviews. These interviews can

be considered the next step in a process-aimed way of making art. Here art is not making a product, but bringing about a process. What is important is the artistic action within the context of society. This is another form of art which we will be focusing on today. This way of making art has already received many names: relational aesthetics, community art, dialogue-based public art, conversational art, but I would like to call it dialogical art. Because it really is a form of art in which the viewer becomes a partner; and his part does not take place when the artwork is finished but during the process itself. Part of this dialogue – the term is often used rather loosely – is the equality between discussion partners and the openness to review their own opinions. These elements are present in the projects in which we can take part. I would like to thank the Groninger Museum for their hospitality and for letting this debate take place here. And also for being the context, for a brief period, for the artworks which were exchanged. It is a wonderful thing that tonight a wide variety of people and voices are represented, which allows the artworks not only to appear in their different contexts or different ways, but which also allows the artworks to be viewed from different angles. Only this way, the German philosopher Hannah Arendt would tell us, can reality give us its true and reliable shape. I wish you an interesting evening, and will now give the floor to Jonas.

JONAS STAAL

So, thank you for two perfect introductions, which makes mine completely unnecessary. But seeing as I am the coordinator of the project Academy of the People, I hereby declare my present involvement as well. And the only variation will be that I will do it in English, because as both Sue-an and Anke have pointed out, the project that we present here tonight is a project that was organised and developed by artists from Minerva Art Academy of Gronin-

gen. A very diverse group of artists who are engaged in autonomous art, working towards becoming teachers in art, and who are doing their Master's degrees. It's a very varied group and they come from all over the world, so out of solidarity we always spoke English. Tonight everybody speaks in the language that they prefer, but I want to uphold the tradition of the earlier classes – classes, sessions, and exchanges. So I want to just very briefly state something about the nature of the sessions that we had. It was during the last six months that we engaged in regular meetings, which started at completely different moments, and at different hours as the artists came in and walked out again. The main focus of these sessions was to explore the relationship between art and propaganda. That seems very far removed from this context here, but what we discussed, what we explored together was the question: at what level does art as an instrument for politics have a role today? When we speak of propaganda, we think it is something that belongs to a long lost past. We explored at what level the term propaganda still applies today. And, of course, there's a very recent and important case study in the Netherlands that most people involved with culture will know, which is the phenomenon of the 'linkse hobby', the left-wing hobby. Or in other words, left-wing propaganda. It was a term that was given to artists by the first Rutte government, supported by the extreme right-wing PVV, the freedom party, to in a way



disqualify art as something that belongs to a privileged elite, nothing but a subsidised luxury for a degenerate intellectual minority. So I really enjoyed this proposition of Sue-an when she said that if eight million people in the Netherlands are involved in amateur art, then we have a massive elite. This is not art for the masses. It's art for a massive elite. For a majority elite, which could be a wonderful oxymoron.

Think of art. The idea of art has changed in the last year in our country. In that it says something about the fact that as artists we want to shape the world. I think it's the essence of what an artist wants to do. But the world equally shapes us. The moment that this phrase 'the left-wing hobby' (de linkse hobby), was used, we felt, and I think most artists felt, that there is not just an image that we want to bring to the world, but that the world brings us an image as well. We are equally framed. And this was, in a way, the beginning of the project that we will be discussing tonight. We will discuss the results tonight. In a way, it was an answer from the artists involved. At one point we'd been discussing the relationship between art and propaganda for hours and hours, all dazed because of my first lecture that took five hours, which I will not re-enact tonight. At a certain moment, frustrated by or maybe annoyed by so much theory on my part, they gave an answer in practice and the answer in practice

is what we present today as the Academy of the People. The idea that this framing of art is something homogenous, and with homogenous I mean that art can somehow be reduced to a single affair. Something that belongs to only a few people and not to the many. This was exactly what they opposed. By engaging directly with the question, what does art mean when we move outside of the museum or we move outside of the galleries and we explore what the notion of art means in day-to-day life. I'm personally absolutely convinced that when it comes to asking people what is important in life - with important I don't mean changing the pension age from 65 to 67; it is not unimportant - but when it comes to asking 'What is the existential meaning or value of life?' we don't answer, 'Oh there was a debate yesterday in parliament where they discussed whether the pension age was going to go up to 67,' or if we're going to make the three percent budget deficit that the European Union doesn't allow for. We always come back to art, in one form or another. And in any form possible. And this exactly, the fact that art does signify debt, and it signifies more than the simple sum at the end of the day of how much money is in our pocket, but it always signifies something more than that for everyone. To somehow show this in a museum, here, while at the same time exploring these different art worlds within the old borders of the museum: that was the answer. That is the Academy of the People.

Let me think of how I could somehow nicely end this introduction. Sometimes you think that you've actually already gotten to the end, and you think, oh, was that the end? So that's like a crucial moment where you shift. So yes, exactly, that was what I wanted to say. The proposition is not so much, do we leave it to the museum to explore new meanings of art, or do we bring art - never previously shown in a museum - to a museum for the first time? It's about this mutual reform. It's an attempt to broaden the scope of what we understand as art. To show its radical diversity, its multiplicity of meanings, which I think is the essence of what art is. The essence that is the multiplicity of the attempt to answer: what is valuable in life? And that's exactly what we're going to do now. We act upon the principle that art is not a tool or a privilege of a specific elite, but that art belongs to the people as a whole. And through art we explore the whole variety of what that concept, that notion, that word means to people. Tonight we act on that principle, and I'm very proud to have all these artworks here present, to have the partners present, to have the artists of Minerva Art Academy who engaged with people from an enormous diversity of backgrounds: from the police station to primary school to the people engaged in the aesthetics of Ikea. I think it's absolutely fantastic that you came here willing to discuss, together with the artists, the background of your work and I'm very proud to have all of the artists here. To have

worked with them. To have seen their work develop over these past months. I think what you show, what you're going to show tonight - I have the privilege of already knowing what that is - I think it shows fantastic and very courageous moves. It shows that once we think about art outside of the concept of what we are used to, there are many, many worlds to win. It was fantastic to work with you. So, enough. I've talked way too much. I'm going to switch to the next slide and introduce my favourite chairman, which is David Strobband. Thank you.



‘I’m proud we created **A REALLY DEMOCRATIC ELECTION in the school’**

DAVID STROBAND: *Okay, I’ll switch to Dutch again. Welcome everyone. I will try to lead this evening. To start with, I would like to give you some practical information. The first is, as Jonas mentioned in his introduction, that the Dutch in our midst will be speaking Dutch and those from abroad will be speaking English, so we will be switching between English and Dutch. At the end of each discussion, because we only have ten to fifteen minutes per discussion - and that is not much as became clear this morning in the preparatory meeting - we will be giving you, the audience, the opportunity to ask one question. You can do this by raising your hand and whoever wins gets his turn and can ask his question. Then the answer will follow, and then at a certain moment I will have to say, you have to finish now, because yes, that is time management for you. It’s not my favourite thing to do, but I am under strict orders that this has to happen.*

IRENE SANCHEZ

David: Okay, so, I think we will start now, and I would first like to invite Irene Sanchez to come to the front. Perhaps you can sit here. Irene managed to bring in this project from a primary school here in Groningen, the Groningse Schoolvereniging. I’ll give you this microphone.

Irene: This one?

David: Okay, I’ll begin with a question, Irene. Can you tell us something about this work of art? Who is the artist and where is the artist at the moment?

Irene: Yes, the work that I bring to the museum tonight is that one, the compilation of canvases that create a big one. And it's a work made by children in a primary school for the third year, class 3A, and tonight I have exchanged my work with the school. And I would like to tell you now how the process of the election of these paintings went.

David: Briefly.

Irene: Yes, really briefly. Okay, so I chose a school because I come from an academy as an artist, so do all my mates, and you might say that art starts in the academy and ends in the museum, but in the middle we have a lot of different places that we can find, as Jonas has said. I was really interested in this primary community which is maybe the first one that we're involved in in our lives: the primary school. So I went there and I made a kind of workshop, a performative action. It was a democratic election. That's how we chose that painting. So I organised an election, I call it my first democratic art election. We really reproduced a real democratic election, but we tried to make it very transparent and honest and real. So in the first part I made a selection of a large amount of works in this school and the kids, organised in groups, had to make a proposal: choose an artwork in the school and propose it to their schoolmates and convince everybody why that work had to be shown in the Groninger Museum. So they presented the candidates. There were three different candidates: one was the colourful peacocks, the second was

the silver hands, a big painting with a lot of hands printed on it, and the third was a free and unexpected proposal from them. It was not in my selection, they chose it themselves, it was a sword made of wood, and a sort of prize they won in a contest. They won that prize in a contest together as a class. So it turned out that the three candidates were works that they had made collectively. They were not by a single artist. I want to mention this especially, because it's really interesting. So then, after this presentation we did the election. I explained the rules to them and they took a piece of paper and started writing. They wanted to keep their vote a secret, as you can see here. We had a real ballot box and envelopes, and then after that we did the counting. The final work was elected with a great majority, the colourful peacocks, and they also chose the name. I have to say that it was not my favourite, so I had to think about democracy and that I really wanted to do it democratically, because I really didn't like it at all.

David: You took the consequences.

Irene: Yes, exactly. So that was the process, and it's kind of simple, because my work is the selection of the works that they chose.

David: You made a selection of their choice?

Irene: I did a tour in the school and I photographed everything that I thought was suitable to be chosen. And I didn't say that they could choose another one, but they did, so it shows that they really felt free to make the election theirs.

David: And they aren't here, because they're in bed by now I think. These artists. Is there a teacher here tonight from the school?

Irene: Yes, their teacher. I tried to collaborate with her, but she wouldn't. I think she tried to have that free time for herself. And that's okay. And in some way that's also nice, because I took over the job during those hours. When she wasn't there I was the educator. And also the artist, so maybe it was better that she wasn't there.

David: You had a lot of roles, because you were the educator, you were the artist, and now you are the representative of the school. And you chose this school in particular because they teach in English at this school, don't they?

Irene: Yes, I chose this school, because it's an English-speaking school. I couldn't go to a Dutch school, even if I really wanted to do it in a public school. But what's cool about an international school is that you can feel it in the children. They were from really different backgrounds and countries. Also we talked about art in the first session, about contemporary art, modern art, and you could really feel it. There were some Italian girls, a Spanish girl, a Swedish boy, an English boy, and a girl from the USA. They really had a lot of cultures from different countries.

David: There are a lot of cultural influences in the school. I'm curious Irene, because you introduced a kind of democratic system in this school and they were able to vote before

they were officially allowed to. What was your experience with it, that they were allowed to vote, what was their reaction?

Irene: I think they got a feeling of excitement, because it was their first democratic art election. It was not my first democratic election, but it was my first artistic election. But I tried to do it, and we were talking about the election, whether they knew about elections, and they told that they went with their parents to real elections, so they knew what it was. They'd already learned how it was done, that process. But they really felt that it was an important moment. It was their responsibility to have the work here tonight. So it's also a thing, it was a real democracy, because they proposed the work and they chose the work together. It was from them to them.

David: Okay, we just heard Jonas talk about art and the broader frontiers of art. Can you say something about the artistic content of your system of democracy in the school? Is it a real artwork for you? Can you say something about that?

Irene: Yes, I think it is, because as Jonas said our job is to shape the world. But I think in this situation, to make visible the politics inside the school, I think that was my job and also to try to imagine how this democratic election would be possible in a school. What if the children would start ruling the school? And also try to imagine an honest democracy and transparent politics in the situation we are living in now. There is a lack of democracy.

I think it's artistic in that way, I think it's something only an artist can do.

David: Last question. Was every student in the school satisfied?

Irene: Yes, I think they were happy with the election. They all liked it, because I think it was for the collective signal. It was not the paintings, it could have been the work. I think they were happy. There was one boy who wasn't really satisfied, but he was kind of a problematic pupil. Not problematic, but I think in general they were happy. They were happier about the experience than the result I think.

David: Are they proud that they're in the museum now?

Irene: Yes, even though they are not here.

David: Is there a question from the audience for Irene?

Q: I was wondering, they went through this process now and voted democratically, but this is the actual result: that their work, or the school's work, is now in the museum. So really, you should give them one more chance to see where it would really end up.

FERDI SPEELMAN

David: I have to start with a sad announcement, because your exchange partner is ill in bed.

Ferdi: That's right, unfortunately.

David: And his name is Jan Hollander isn't it? Ferdi: Jan Hollander.

David: Jan Hollander, Jan Hollander is, I will introduce him briefly, a curator at the police station, and you can tell us what this means.

Ferdi: It means that whatever is on the walls in terms of paintings or photographs at the police station, has been selected by him and another colleague. That's what it means.

David: So, he is the curator of the art collection at the police station, you could say?

Ferdi: Exactly.

David: Okay, Ferdi, so what is your artwork?

Ferdi: What I made, or what he introduced?

David: Well, what did he make? What did you receive from him here?

Ferdi: The painting you can see here, of the beach chair on the beach, is what he painted himself. He is a painter in his free time and saw this project as a wonderful opportunity to show one of his own works. He was able to justify this by saying that he once partook in an exhibition at the police station, so in that sense it still conforms to our exchange setup. And this is what he painted in his own time on Schiermonnikoog. And this is the chair he came across on a walk and he thought, yes, I should make a painting of this.

David: Is he proud to be present here in the museum?



The THIEF, the CONFESSION and the art

Ferdi: Yes, absolutely.

David: Was that one of his deep wishes? We cannot ask him now, but do you know?

Ferdi: I suspect it was, yes.

David: You suspect so.

Ferdi: Yes, and I also think that that may have been the main reason he participated in this project at all. The opportunity to show his own work at the Groninger Museum.

David: Okay, that's clear. But he didn't approach you, you approached him. What was the reason to approach this man at the Groningen police station?

Ferdi: My reason for approaching the police station was that we had to find a context outside the regular art context, and I had a prejudice about police officers. I thought, they are not interested in art or culture, they simply don't think about things like that. I wondered whether this prejudice was right or not. So that's why I approached the police.

David: So you went there with a

preconception. Was this confirmed or not?

Ferdi: It was unfortunately confirmed, yes. In the sense of what is usually shown at police stations regarding painting or photography, and that there is little response or feedback from the police officers who work there. I asked what they do respond to, because with this project I wanted to make something that would appeal to police officers, that was my mission, as it were. When I asked Jan what they responded to, it turned out to particularly be works with macho-like themes, such as photographs of sports cars and that kind of thing. That goes down well at the police station.

David: So they had the wrong person with you?

Ferdi: Yes, unfortunately they did.

David: Can you say something about what you showed at the police station?

Ferdi: I wanted to keep it close to the police officers themselves, so they would like it, or at least would respond to it. And I decided to show a number of objects that I'd stolen over the years from different places in an installation at the police station. This is the installation, though it looks a bit vague from here. This picture may give you a better idea.

David: This is a collection you built up over

how many years?
Ferdi: I have a list here, I see that the first year is 2006, and it goes up to 2013, so it's an ongoing project.

David: And before this, you didn't steal?

Ferdi: No, no.

David: That started suddenly in 2006.

Ferdi: Yes, as soon as you hit puberty, a little, yes.

David: As far as I can see it has been beautifully displayed.

Ferdi: Yes, I really did my best.

David: And it's almost as you see sometimes in crime movies, if someone has to go to prison and his pockets are emptied and then things are displayed so beautifully as well. This is present at the police station and is being presented as a work of art, with a beautiful ribbon in front of it. So it is also a protected space. How do people respond to it? Because you already had your preconception. So they could almost arrest you for showing this?

Ferdi: It's rather funny actually, because when I was setting up the exhibition, there was a police officer who talked to me and said, 'Wow, this is really fun. I've never seen something like that here.' I also wrote an accompanying text in which I ask for a response from visitors and police officers, and in which I describe what I have done and that these are stolen objects. And the funny thing is, because it is presented as an art installation, it's not taken seriously. Or perhaps they think, 'It is art so I won't question it.' But they don't talk about the punishable facts themselves. That they don't do.

David: They simply think they are beautiful objects.

Ferdi: Yes, and they also recognise something

of themselves in it.

David: Could you give us an example of this?

Ferdi: It is related to their own work in the sense that they enjoy seeing this as an art object rather than a rippling creek or a tree standing somewhere.

David: So their perception and openness really goes beyond what you expected.

Ferdi: Yes.

David: I wonder, when you put it there like that, it's quite an aesthetic presentation, while stealing objects can also be seen as a kind of aesthetic, or as a kind of trick. How do you see this?

Ferdi: What do you mean exactly?

David: I mean that this is presented within an art context, the result of your actions. And if you turn it into a work of art then the actions which preceded it are also in the service of the artwork. How did this happen here? Did you also see the stealing as a trick?

Ferdi: No, the stealing originated from a, umm, yes, as I wrote in my text "opportunity makes the thief". And sometimes, either from a feeling of excitement or for the sheer kick, you think, shit, I can take this without anyone noticing. And so far this has happened several times.

David: But it also had something to do with you feeling like a poor artist, right?

Ferdi: This is how I presented myself to the outside world, as the poor student you have to take out every once in a while because of his low income. This is also reflected in the kind

of objects. For example, you can see a plate from Ikea, a library book or a pepper mill from the V&D or something from H&M. All things which a student my age might take.

David: And the list you presented here is indeed very detailed. I do wonder, as you wrote yourself, you entered the lion's den and it's a kind of confession. What brought you to making this confession now?

Ferdi: At first I started thinking about what I could give the police and what they would recognise, what they would enjoy. And then I thought, okay, what did I do wrong as a person myself, and how can I use this? Then I thought, I have a small collection of stolen goods and for me it might be fun that I can show it this way. That I can make it public under the guise of art. That I will emerge unscathed.

David: That's my next question: have you emerged unscathed? Or is a fine or prison-time still threatening, or ? What might that be?

Ferdi: The consequences - this work can be seen at the police station at the Rademarkt.

I advise you all to go and have a look. I also don't know how many people know about the work now and what consequences this could have. But, as I indicated, the police officers who saw it consider it a piece of art and not a criminal offence.

David: Art compensates you, in a manner of speaking.

Ferdi: Yes, you could say that.

David: You had intensive discussions about

this over the past few months, could this be the definition of art? That a work of art gives you the freedom to make everything you illegally obtained legal?

Ferdi: Yes, absolutely.

David: Could you say anything else? Briefly, because time's up. You present this as art, what do you think is its artistic content? Is that the presentation on the table, or the process surrounding it?

Ferdi: It is related to each other, I think, and also the discussion that resulted from it. Because the discussion and the judgment of the work by the audience ultimately make the work what it is. Something which is also visible in Jonas' work, I think, is that you can bring about a discussion with art and in doing so try to extend the boundaries of reality. It would be a wonderful thing if that were the result of this.

David: That's a very clear answer, thank you. Any questions from the audience?

Q: You indicated that this is an on-going project, so how long should I keep my door locked?

Ferdi: I don't have your address, but I would like to add that these are objects from companies and not from persons. Companies that are insured. So you're safe.

David: It's quite a good question. A confession is also the end of a process, in a way.

Ferdi: For now. But I think that this mischievous impulse, this 'can I do this?' is in me. So secretly I think it will stay.

David: Ferdi, thank you very much.

'One way or another **POLITICAL ASPECTS** *do tend to seep into your work'*



JIMI KLEINBRUININK

David: Okay, we are now with two different people. I'll start with you, the guest, Pierre Carrière from Ikea. May I ask what it is you do for Ikea?

Pierre: Well, I'm not actually from Ikea. I made a book about Ikea art. The rose, everyone has probably seen it. It's a format that's hard to miss. With three friends, a photographer and two designers, I visited twenty-eight people over the past year and a half who have this painting. We thought it was quite special that 100,000 people in the Netherlands have this exact same painting hanging over their sofa or their bed or in the conference room or in the toilet. So we made a portrait of these people with their rose and interviewed them.

David: And the book will be presented shortly, and is called 'In de ban van de roos'.

Pierre: That is completely correct.

David: Yes, exactly. Then I will now take the microphone again and give it to Jimi. I want to apologise by the way, because I thought that you worked for Ikea itself, but you don't. My apologies. Jimi, the work of art standing here, or lying here actually, could you tell us something about it, and what your involvement or affinity with it is?

Jimi: Once we had decided that we were going to exchange and also present in the museum, I thought, what would be the best way to put your foot in it. Artists and Ikea don't go together the way I see it, so I chose Ikea. During a later lesson I heard from another student that Pierre was making this book, and I thought that that would be a great connection. I approached him and he told me that the rose was Ikea's bestselling product. So that's why I chose the rose.

David: Okay, Ikea's bestselling product. So you went to Ikea, you are talking about this as if it were a breeze, it's a company and a very different world than the art world, but these are designed products. How do you feel about this?

Jimi: I also discussed this with Pierre and really Ikea has quite a number of really good designers working for them. I visited a few artists who produce sculptures for Ikea and yes, their own autonomous work is really still, at any rate, well put together, but it's not really avant-garde, or anything. And perhaps this also has something to do with the fact

that they entered into business with Ikea, that they have to hold themselves back.

David: The reason was that it is a kind of mass production in your eyes. It is a company that has a great many clients. It is popular. But does it also have a different side? Because I just heard that politics was discussed in many of the lessons as well. Now Ikea is a company whose escutcheon is not free from blemishes, politically and socially speaking. Has this had any influence on infiltrating the company?

Jimi: I did think about doing something critical, but ultimately decided not to. I'm not interested in that, and eventually I chose to take on their image or identity, somewhat. To a certain extent.

David: And Pierre, I wonder about this. Could you tell me something about the work Jimi presented in Ikea?

Pierre: As I said before, I don't work for Ikea, so I have no insights at all, I don't know Ikea's curator.

David: But you're partners, so that's why I'm asking.

Pierre: Yes, yes. But what you just said about designers. I think that especially with regards to the products for sale at Ikea, that some designers make really interesting products. Stools or cutlery, or such. But the art department, let's say the art sales, that really is another level. There's a difference in nuance there. But Jimi's sculptures, I really rather like them. And they're not expensive.

David: Unlike other Ikea products.

Pierre: And also the name he came up with was really quite good. But he should tell you this himself.

Jimi: Yes, Sculptura Variera. The little bench I had bought myself cost 2.99 and I had taken the barcode from it, so that if someone wanted to buy it, that would appear on the bill. This way Ikea would not be making too much money from what I had done.

David: So that is rather idealistic. You taunted company policy a little.

Jimi: Perhaps. I hope so. That would be nice.

David: The work you made: is that a piece of work you could have made at the academy, or was it really specifically aimed at the form-language of Ikea?

Jimi: The rough shape is something I had made before, only in the final detailing I took into account the commodification of my work..

David: Could you elaborate on that?

Jimi: I made the exact same thing. I never made something in a series before. Normally I allow for much more coincidence, or serendipity, or whatever you want to call it. It has a homogenous colour. I have tried to think product-focused, a little, as far as I am able to.

David: How many did you make?

Jimi: Three.

David: Three, all right. And these were in the store? In the showroom? How did this go with the sales?

Jimi: I had put an email address at the bottom with the request of contacting me should

someone have bought or found them. And after four, five days I received two emails, saying, 'Hi, I've found it, so now what?' I sent them an email in reply, but received no response. The longest one was in the store for twelve days. After we had done the action, I went together with Elke, who is here taking photographs all the time, and Younes. I went to look every three days to see whether they were still there. And this specific one was there the longest. And after fifteen days I dropped by and in the exact same spot was an Ikea brush and a pot of mola, which is red paint. Yes, it seems like that was meant for me.

David: You got something in return.

Jimi: I got something in return, yes.

David: Can you, Pierre, you made that book and the book has become a connection with Jimi, can you briefly say something about the value of the work from that book? What has it brought you specifically?

Pierre: When we had the idea to portray these people and interview them with the painting, we were very much focused on the painting itself. Seeing where it's hung and its setting. And of course, there are twenty-eight photographs, so it's looking inside someone's house twenty-eight times. So, the people who have the rose, what else do they have? The only thing I was a little bit worried about was that we would end up in twenty-eight similar interiors, with the same kind of people on the couch, or on the bed. But that turned out not to be the case at all, and I thought that

was quite special. We visited student rooms, detached villas, conference rooms and cafes. So that was really a lot of fun. As the project went on, the people started to fascinate me more than the rose. At a certain point I was done with the rose. And the stories became different as well after a time. Once it was about an illness that was overcome, a friend who had passed away. We really moved away from the paintings, so to speak. I thought that was quite special. I really rediscovered interviewing. I used to do that a lot, then I didn't for a while, and because of this book I really enjoyed it.

David: So really, you visited the people, their homes, with their work of art. And you deposited little artworks anonymously in Ikea. I wonder, because you are partners in this project, can you tell me what you learned from each other or how you experienced this collaboration?

Jimi: What Pierre told me was that all these people had a personal story with a mass product, and I really hadn't expected that. I thought that was wonderful to hear, I thought that everything there, it has no life, it's only printed. But yes, I take that back, because people really put their own story into it.

Pierre: The fun thing is, and this also comes out in the book, is how differently people can look at something. Say, for example, at art. We can call it a thing, but let's call it art. Some people said about the rose, it's an eye-catcher; it's large and red and really stands out. For

one person it was too much for the living room, so they hung it in the bedroom. Other people thought it was neutral, something red, not too bright, really a kind of wallpaper. Where one person considers it to be a piece of work that doesn't bother him, someone else thinks it's an enormous eye-catcher. I thought that was special to discover, the experience of art in general that is.

David: Has Jimi made you aware of this as well?

Pierre: What Jimi did, he says he adapted to Ikea's style concerning colour and a series. I wonder whether people really bought it. I'm really curious as to whether that came about. **David:** You made the work, and you are now an artist, an autonomous artist. How do you feel about one of your works being in Ikea? Does this make it a mass product, or does it remain a work of art?

Jimi: It remains a work of art, but it does feel a little bit absorbed or something.

David: You have been absorbed by the big mouth.

Jimi: Yes, and I don't know how it ended. I don't know if Leoni happens to be in the audience?

Leoni: Yes.

Jimi: Have you visited Ikea recently?

Leoni: Yes, they wouldn't cooperate. They said, 'I heard an employee on the telephone talking to a sales manager about it, and he said, 'Oh, that tower.' And then he said, 'We will not cooperate.'

David: And who is Leoni?

Jim: Leoni is someone who stalked us. She is a journalist in training and I think she does this really well. I'm meeting her now for the first time as well.

David: She asked questions at Ikea but they wouldn't respond. So there's a little bit of unease at Ikea?

Jim: Yes, and that response as well. It was difficult from the start.

David: Considering the time, are there any questions from the audience?

Q: Did you consider approaching Ikea yourself at first?

David: I will still be rounding off.

Q: I mean at the beginning of the project. Jimi: Yes, I did.

Q: And then you were rejected at once?

Jim: No, first I sent an email and then I dropped by and submitted a kind of project plan. They said they would pass it on to a manager. Eventually during one of the meetings we decided to give it this shape, a guerrilla action.

David: Does that answer your question?

Yes? Okay, well then, I would like to thank you very much for coming here. Pierre, Jimi, thank you.

The MAGIC WORLD of ICT and THE REVUE

JANPIER EN HUGO

David: Due to circumstances, Hugo is not here tonight. So, it's Janpier and two people from Ordina, I think.

Janpier: I also brought someone from the academy.

David: Okay, that's wonderful. Why don't you introduce them?

Janpier: Next to me is Patrick, an employee at Ordina, next to him Rene, also an employee at Ordina. Next to him Emiel Joorman, a student from Minerva Academy for Pop Culture, where I work, and I myself am a student in the Master Art Education programme at Minerva Art Academy, so I'm a student as well. And together with Emiel and a number of students we prepared an exchange with Ordina, so for the artwork Ordina is showing here tonight.

David: Perhaps you should explain what Ordina is exactly. Or perhaps you could explain this yourself?

Janpier: I think they are very good at that.

Patrick: Yes, Ordina is an ICT company, we do a lot of posting projects, application development, controlling of other companies' systems, advisory services, consultancy, it's quite comprehensive, but very much ICT.

David: And listed in the stock exchange.

Patrick: That is important to mention.

David: Now we have a bit of an idea of what you do in the company, though it all still sounds rather formal. But we will soon find out more. Janpier, what was the reason for you and the students of Minerva Academy for Pop Culture

to visit this company?

Janpier: Jonas' assignment was to find a partner with whom you would feel the least safe, if you like. Who for you would be the least likely partner to do an art exchange with. I had made a list and on number 3 it said, the middle manager of a large ICT company. Of which I thought, I don't really know any and I don't really find it very interesting. Then, as now, people laughed about this a little and I thought, you know what? That's what I will do. I contacted your personnel officer Harco de Jager and said, 'This is the project, I would like to exchange art with you.' I received an email with the reply, 'We have two artworks and they are both in Nieuwegein. We wouldn't mind exchanging them, but to insure them will cost a lot of money.' And then we said, by now Hugo had joined me, 'It's not so much the artworks, we're from Minerva Academy for Pop Culture and it is much more about objects, designs, sculptures or music which mean something to you. That's really what we're looking for. What is important to you? Meaningful objects, designs, sculptures.' And this is how we came into contact with Marga van Nes, Facility Manager at Ordina Groningen, and we had a really good conversation there, I thought. Because we found each other in what Ordina calls its 'party piece' and what is presented here as a work of art, and that is the system that has been designed and with which you can, as it were, visualise large crowds of people. By combin-

ing data from smartphones and other IT you could make predictions about public safety. We found this fascinating. In the conversation that followed with Patrick, and later with Rene, we talked about all kinds of current developments, which stir up many feelings in people, think for example of the PRISM-affair and Obama with his unfortunate speech. But they're also concerned with cyber-attacks, so it's a very topical subject and we thought it would be wonderful to present a subject like that in a context such as the museum and to show it in a way in which we would normally look at a work of art. 'What does it mean? What does it tell me? What meaning can we give to it?' To look at it this way as well.

David: Are you saying with this that when you present something in the museum that the museum, as here in the Groninger Museum, it almost has the architecture of a fortress, that the museum is a kind of isolated institution that doesn't have much affinity with society and that you really want to introduce a social phenomenon which is very topical into the museum?

Janpier: That is one aspect, but another aspect is that the audience here looks at objects in a certain way. And looking at this kind of work in that way is also kind of interesting, we think, like, what is this all about?

David: I'm curious about that. How should we be looking at this, as art people, as it were?

Patrick: My intention was to show what's really behind these laptops and smartphones

and tablets. One of the pieces Janpier refers to, you will see it later in the short film, is a kind of red-green stain across Amsterdam. That is the heat map, and that is really what started off the whole idea, like, hey that's cool, that looks good, and it will give you at least something visual. Because we had the same thing Janpier had with ICT, we had that with art, yes, what is this, should we be doing something with this? Until we started talking and then we thought, yes, this is interesting. So the idea behind this is to really show a number of ICT aspects and in the course of the preparatory talks we had, crowd management, the heat maps as you call them, was discussed extensively. But also the part about cyber-attacks, that is also why my colleague Rene is here. He is the middle manager of the Security Department.

David: That sounds rather abstract.

Patrick: That sounds abstract?

David: Well, it does to me. Middle manager of a ...

Patrick: Well, he is head of the department.

David: Okay, that sounds more concrete.

Patrick: Yes, well, I'm quoting Janpier.

David: Yes, very well. Well, I'm curious, you told us something about the work we see here. It has a high visual content if I understand correctly. Now, I rather wonder, because Janpier and his students entered the company as well, what was their input?

Patrick: One of the things they put in when we met was a great deal of enthusiasm, good

ideas about what they would show us as art. So their input, for some people at least, was good expectations, and that is in itself very good as well. On Thursday the 27th we're going for drinks with the office, something we do every month, and Janpier and his friends will be performing there. We think it will be very interesting.

David: It will be a revue, I see.

Patrick: Yes.

David: The Ordina Cantina Revue. And what will be happening there, Jan?

Janpier: They are students we worked with for six months. Hugo and I as teachers, I mean. It's a great diversity of students, there is a guy who hacks printers, there is a girl who designs jewellery, there are musicians of all kinds, there are break dancers, a magician. We will be showing short films. It is, you could say, a variety show. Presented by Emiel and a number of his friends. They have an institute called the Mayors of Torhout. It's a bit of a long story, but what it comes down to is that they are going to present the show and at the same time examine a connection between us and Ordina on the spot, by doing interviews and showing short films. And so, they make a show of about an hour, an hour-and-a-half.

David: Okay, so that is going to happen. Now, I'm very curious, because I hear there are hackers there as well. Will this put anyone in danger? Or magicians, that can be very threatening as well.

Janpier: There will be no immediate danger.

But indirectly, I cannot make any guarantees.

David: Because I wouldn't be surprised if there are some hackers among the population of your company, or are there?

Patrick: Yes.

David: Yes, no exactly. So that is a match then.

Patrick: We do work on ethical hacking, so hacking as an assignment for a client. Just to reassure you.

David: For me, a whole world opened up when I learned how your company interacts with this world. So, what you told about these cyber-attacks, of which we also have a visual representation, it is a world you don't know at all, that you sometimes read something about in the media, but because of the contact with you I have also started looking into it more. And a new world has opened up for me. I would really like it if you could tell us a little bit more about this, about how you do this.

Patrick: Well, how we do it is as an assignment for a client, as I said. Companies also see cyber criminals on the news, and what you have to do protect your company, that is very often your reputation. How do you do business as a company? Web shops or other forms of client interaction, apart from legal requirements made for protecting your data concerning suppliers and customers. Think if you're a large bank or a large web shop, you are able to exist because of the faith others put in you. Whether you're a bank or not. The ING was in the news recently with all these DDOS attacks; ING was the bank which appeared in the news

[the most negatively] by far, but it has in fact suffered as many attacks as the Rabobank or ABN Amro. However, they have a completely different way of communicating and so their clients' faith has not been damaged. What we do for ministries, banks, large companies is to test whether they can be hacked easily. This requires skills which have a lot to do with creativity. You really need an artist to look at standard company management in a different way. They look at things from a, I would almost say more holistic whole. Does that answer your question a little?

David: Yes, I do think that that is an answer. I'm also curious

Janpier: And we also want to put the, say, traditional understanding of art up for discussion. That is also why I liked how we were introduced to Ordina so much, because at first it looked as if there could be no exchange because there were only two artworks. And then when you start talking to each other and you try to build up a kind of relationship with each other, suddenly the understanding of art and the discussion about art takes a completely different turn. For me at any rate, that is very valuable. And also for my students at Minerva Academy for Pop Culture it's a good thing that we are doing something in a space we would normally never go to. And enter into a relationship with people there, whom our students would normally not have a relationship with. So that they are going to make things for a target group, where they want to

show something of themselves, but that they also take into account the kind of people they meet there. So there is a dialogue. To me art is also that conversation taking place, an open conversation, with respect for each other, with equality. I think that is something we are realising in this project. And I would like to see this continuing for a while. As I said, the input they bring is very fascinating to me.

David: So there's more of a future in this.

Janpier: Yes.

David: Yes, okay. A question from the audience now. A brief question.

Q: Yes, I know, I'm sorry. It is very inappropriate for me to be asking a question now. But I'm not entirely clear on what I still want to hear from Ordina. Janpier is talking about an equal conversation, and I believe that that is absolutely what you had. It is clear you entered a collaboration for the long term. At the same time, the programmes you are presenting here, which have been developed for monitoring the safety, these were developed by you without us as an audience, and that is why I think it is really important that you are showing it to an audience here, but we don't know that we are being monitored in that way, so the way in which you are making such a programme really allows for an equal relationship. And would you, for example, be open to Irene's project in which she lets schoolchildren vote about a work of art? Should we not also have more of an insight and a say about the mechanisms which check

up on us on a daily basis without us knowing who makes them and without us knowing who are responsible for them?

David: That is a very long question.

Patrick: Yes, you said a brief question. Yes, I agree with you that citizens, if I may call them that, should be more aware and should also be presented with choices about what it is that you can monitor. The system you see very much ties in with our legal department. And this legal department, and certainly marketing, is allergic to everything that looks even remotely like Big Brother. We did this in collaboration with KPN. What we monitor, the pictures, is absolutely not individual phone calls or individual messages, so that might be good to know. We only look at the amount of traffic on KPN's GSM masts; KPN delivers us this data in a very safe way and we have absolutely no way of tracing who or what that is. But that's us, Ordina. That there are possibilities to do this is obvious, but you would know more about this.

Rene: Perhaps for now, yes. But I don't want to ferment even more trouble. And I just did. On the Internet, means are available where you can type a name and then you get the complete mapping of a person and all persons who play a part in his environment. Work, but also privacy: children, family, everything. And at a certain point, it is possible to target someone completely, from a hacker's perspective. Way too much information really, collected from the public domain, which might be used by

someone with less than correct ideas. And everyone has access to this. And is it really only geniuses that are behind this? No. It's sixteen, seventeen-year-old boys who are making this. On YouTube, you can buy a DDOS-attack for ten dollars that you can execute yourself. You simply buy it in on a YouTube advert. What we do as Ordina is to increase the protection of consumer data, of citizens. We are the 'good guys', at least so far. But we really have to keep an eye on people. Are they staying on the right side of the line? Because it just takes two clicks and you're on the other side. It's very easy, too easy. And certainly with the discussion now exploding all over the media, about NSA being able to trace everything, that's a very good discussion, because in the Netherlands the situation is no different. Perhaps that is a thought that scares people. I often hear people say, what do I have to hide? My counter-question always is, what do you have to protect? That makes people think. Perhaps this is a brief answer to your question.

David: I always learned that art has to do something with you, with emotions. I think everyone will be leaving this hall with feelings of paranoia. That is one notion of what art can do, but anyway, I'm concluding this discussion. I thank you all very much.

LAIKUEN CHAN

David: We're going to do this talk in English again. Ewoud van der Ploeg, biologist. Laikuen Quen, artist at Minerva Art Academy. Tell me, Laikuen about the artwork here.

Laikuen: The artwork here is the two boxes with insects here from Ewoud.

David: What's the artwork here?

Ewoud: My artwork?

David: Yes.

Ewoud: Well, we were talking about it as soon as she came in. Is it an artwork, or is it a scientific collection? Well, I think I also discussed this for a few seconds with Jonas earlier this evening. The left box can be best described as a scientific collection, larval skins. The right box is a composition of different insects of different colours. It took some time for me to choose the insects, place them in the box, so maybe this can be considered art.

David: It's an artistic composition, you made.

Ewoud: I tried to make an artistic composition out of it by choosing insects of different shapes, different colours to show the diversity in insects.

David: But your work as a biologist is to make scientific presentations or artistic presentations? Or both, perhaps?

Ewoud: Well, my job as a biologist is to

*'This project EMPOWERED ME
it changed my point of view'*

research nature, and it doesn't have anything to do with art normally. So I was really surprised when you came to me for an art exchange. I was surprised and didn't really know what to do.

David: And what was the reason to go to someone like Ewoud?

Laikuen : Because I heard that he has a really, really fantastic animal at his house, it's a 'steenmarter' (a stone marten). So I went to his house and then I discovered something even more fantastic, his collection of insects. So I think that would be more meaningful than a 'steenmarter'.

David: And for you, what was the reason to go there, and to bring some of your work to his workplace, or his house? It's your house, right?

Ewoud: Well, it is my house indeed, but I've turned it into a workplace. I live among the insects and other materials I need for that. So it's my house, but also a bit my workplace, I think.

David: To put the question to you. I'm considering Ewoud's house as a work of art. Ewoud describes it as living between his insects and all his biological stuff; that sounds to me a bit like a work of art. Is it your intention? Or is it your opinion too?

Laikuen: I have to say that I really like some parts of this house. Yeah, it's also kind of like art, like the big box that you have, your dragonflies; it's also like, really like an artwork. And also a lot of beetles in an aquarium. Yeah, in glass boxes. It's really cool.

David: And when you look at Ewoud's work, how do you see that? He's describing



it as a scientific presentation and an artistic presentation, how do you consider it? Do you agree with him?

Laikuen : Yeah, in some ways I agree with him. But also with all the boxes that he has, he shows some kind of artistic composition. If he would display all his boxes here, then for me it would be really very beautiful. For me, it should be considered artwork.

David: And did you make the choice of these two presentations, or did Ewoud do that?

Laikuen: I made the choice that I wanted the dragonflies displayed and then, for the second box he made the choice.

David: But did he make his choice earlier or did he make his choice especially for this project, the right box?

Laikuen: The right box is for this project.

David: Okay. And do you have some

relationship with the dragonfly, or ?

Laikuen : The relationship with the dragonfly, we talked about this earlier, with my work, my relationship with the insects. I collect gloves and then I make them into prints. For me the collection is a little bit like my collection of pieces of evidence of life from the street.

Because all the gloves that I collect from the street, mostly they're just lost on the street, are single, and they just seem so unwanted and useless. Normally when people drop their gloves, they don't turn back anymore. They just buy new gloves, and then the single ones just stay at the bottom of the drawer forever. That's what I think. So I think, nobody wants them

anymore, I'll just take them. Also as a way of collecting material for my work.

David: And you brought Ewoud a print of a glove. I'm curious about your precise relationship with this glove. Because you come from another part of the world. Do they wear gloves there?

Laikuen: No.

David: No, no.

Laikuen: No, I come from a tropical country, Malaysia. We don't really need gloves at all. So I'd actually never owned a pair of gloves before I came here. So it's a new thing for me.

David: So for you it was very strange to come across such a thing as a glove here in the Netherlands. And then you started collecting them immediately?

Laikuen: Yeah, I think it's really interesting, because it's a new thing that we can just find gloves in the street. That never happened in Malaysia.

David: You were taking this glove as a phenomenon to Ewoud. He knows the glove very well I think, he comes from the Netherlands. Were you surprised by this present?

Ewoud: Well, I have to say, I'm a biologist and I work in nature a lot, so I'm used to the cold as well. I don't have gloves myself. Maybe somewhere, but I don't know where, and I don't know if they fit anymore. So I don't have gloves either. But I think I wasn't really surprised about getting a glove. Like you said, Malaysia is pretty warm, no gloves needed. For me it would be the same I think when I would travel

to Malaysia and I would see, what is it called, a parasol? An umbrella to protect you from the sun? We don't need it in the Netherlands, so I would be surprised to find umbrellas I think in Malaysia. So to make something out of things you find in the street, I think you need some creativity for that. I think it's rubbish, but you can really make something from it. That was really interesting to see.

David: How did that work for you, when you met Ewoud for the first time? Are your ideas about art, have they changed since you saw this collection there, and his house full of collections of natural things?

Laikuen: There is a lot. Not just generally on art, but also about how Ewoud sees the animals and the insects and it also opened my eyes a lot about the insects. It's a very interesting perspective, how he sees the lives of the insects.

David: I can imagine that it's important for you, for the development of your artworks. Is that true?

Laikuen: Yes.

David: Yes, can you say something more about that, to conclude?

Laikuen: I don't know.

David: Or is it something that is developing now? It's a moment of learning and developing. Will you be staying in contact with each other for the next months, or year, or ?

Laikuen: Yeah, I think so.

David: Okay, okay. Are there any questions from the audience? I thank you both for this nice conversation.

FRANCESCA LAI

David: We'll speak in English again, because Francesca comes from Italy and she speaks English very well. Let's start. What was your reason for choosing the synagogue in Groningen, Francesca?

Francesca: I can say I have this fascination for religion even though I don't have a specific knowledge about it. I mean, I come from a Catholic background, because as you know in Italy, religion is a very big issue and it influences politics and society and culture a lot, but I wanted to approach it in a lighter way and to find out things behind religion in a more playful way. So even though I didn't really investigate the theological meaning of the material I was working with, I think I went more into the poetic, philosophical or aesthetic aspect of it, so considering more the images that religion brings. In this case, looking at the words of religious books.

David: Okay, we'll speak about that later, because now I'm curious to know which artwork came from the synagogue to this

room. Perhaps you can tell us something about it, Marcel?

Marcel: Yes. Francesca came as an angel from heaven.

David: That's quite Catholic.

Marcel: Yes, I'll surprise you: I'm a Catholic, too. I'm the manager of the synagogue, but I'm a Catholic, too. So she came like an angel down from the ceiling of the synagogue, like many angels in the Old Testament, in the Torah and the Bible, and she stood there and she told me about this project. We went to my office, it's in the Nieuwstad, you know, where all the

David: Yes.

Marcel: I work there too, behind the window. So we sat there and we talked about what she could take from the synagogue to the museum and I looked around myself, around us, and in this room we saw several religious objects and I was thinking, should I give her some religious objects representing Judaism? Or the synagogue? But many of these objects were in Appingedam, of all places. There's a museum in Appingedam and - 'bruikleen', wat is dat in het Engels? - on loan, we gave them. So there were not many objects anymore. And then suddenly we looked at a painting. It's that one over there, and it's made by Alian Brouwer.

And it's a lady, you could pronounce her name as 'alien', but it's just a normal Groninger name, Alian. I met her because I was working for the university newspaper, the UK, as an art editor, and I went with my bike through the Visserstraat and I saw her studio. And I saw her



*'I wanted to show the
SIMILARITIES IN RELIGIONS,
which are so often hidden to us'*

paintings hanging there. I saw her paintings, very monumental paintings with strange features on them, and I went in and I wanted to write an article about her. I met her, we talked with each other and I was so fascinated by her work that not only did I write an article about her, but I offered her an exhibition at the synagogue. And her work hung in the synagogue five, six years ago and that is the painting she gave to us as a present for the special opportunity to present her work at the synagogue. She was so grateful that she gave this to our foundation, the Stichting Folkingsstraat Synagogue.

David: And it's a painting with a menorah.

Marcel: It's a menorah, yes. The seven-armed candle, and it has something to do with music. It's made of paint, oil paint and papier-mâché, etc., with some gold paint and gold paper. It symbolises her fascination for Judaism. She was a Christian, but she was fascinated by Judaism, and she showed that with this painting.

David: And the home of this painting is the synagogue, and you bring it here to the museum. It's quite a different context to put it in, I think, because it's not a religious institute. What's the difference between them? To see it here, or in the synagogue?

Marcel: My reason for giving this to Francesca was that it was the greatest wish of Alian Brouwer to have her work hanging here, shown in the Groninger Museum, like most artists in the city of Groningen would like to have their work exhibited in the Groninger

Museum. But most will never show their work in the Groninger Museum I'm afraid. So this is my sneaky way to smuggle her work into the Groninger Museum. And there is some other notion, she died of cancer. She died of cancer three years ago. And in the last months of her life she emailed me. She emailed me saying, 'Marcel, I'm dying, I have cancer, what should I do?' How do you respond to that? At the time, I didn't know how to respond. So nowadays, I ride my bike every day across the Korreweg, the Floresvijver, she was born there in a house near the Floreskerk. Every day when I ride through that part of the street I see Alian as a young girl in my imagination. I see her as a living girl and now she's dead. And it's my kind of way of honouring her.

David: That's a beautiful and clear story. My question to Francesca: what, can you explain to us, did you do in the synagogue? In relation to your philosophical ideas and about religion?

Francesca: I worked with books, with sacred books. What I did was to take not only books from the Christian religion, but also from Buddhism, I took a few copies of the Quran, and a few copies of the Bible, so I mixed them up. I spread them all around that square inside the synagogue, all those books from different religions. I hung them in a way so that you could walk through them. And another thing I did, which I think is the playful approach I was talking about, was to extrapolate sentences from each book and put a sentence from one book into another. So to transfer all the

sentences into different books. So a sentence from the Bible goes into the Quran, and a sentence from the Quran goes into the gospel of the Buddha, etc. And those sentences are not written just with a normal pen, but with a UV-light pen, which is a pen that has invisible ink so you don't see anything if you look at the books. So it's not really like an intervention that's there, but it's also not there. So I didn't ruin the books, but in a way I did. So it's a bit ambiguous in that sense. But it's visible when you light it with a UV-light, it's a flashlight. So it's actually an interactive work, because people are allowed to walk around them and shine light onto the books and look for the sentences which I wrote. Also the way I wrote them; I wrote the sentences very informally, handwritten, like a kind of diary. Like notes. So it's a way for me to also get in touch with the book in a more humane way.

David: Because you are presenting these books in a very special way, a very precise way, can you say something about that?

Francesca: Well, it does relate to the architecture of the synagogue, but the meaning of it is that I wanted the books to kind of float. So to have them flying, like coming up with new meanings. And also in a way that people have to look around as they walk around the words in them.

David: I'm now hearing you talk about your project. I'm wondering is it also your, or was it also your intention to make a connection between all these religions? Something like

an Archimedean project where you organise a kind of conference between all religions in the world, it's a very idealistic project.

Francesca: I approached those books in a kind of neutral way. So without really taking a position, or a specific thought. I just read parts of them and I extrapolated the sentences that don't really belong to the religion. So all those sentences never mentioned the god the book refers to, but they all have a poetic quality, or an existential quality. So I wrote some of them. I can maybe read one as an example, shall I?

David: Yeah.

Francesca: Yeah? Okay. But I won't tell you from which book it is, because that's also the meaning of it: to make you wonder which book they come from. So well, 'Fruits are nourished by the same water, yet we give each a different taste.' 'For him without concentration there is no peace, and for the unpeaceful how can there be happiness?' 'It is useful to understand action, also unlawful action and also inaction. Mysteriousness is the path of action.' So, these were very inspiring.

David: Yes. Because you chose this synagogue, you explained why, but is this also the place to make this kind of connection between religions? How do you feel about that?

Francesca: Well, actually I went there because I didn't know that space, so I wanted to take a risk. I wanted to know how they would react to me, because I only know the Catholic environment. And I didn't really mean to do that project there, because I didn't really know

if it was possible. I just wanted to step into a sacred place and see what would happen, and I could never have imagined I would be allowed to make an installation there, so freely. So I've been very lucky in that sense.

David: Can you elaborate on that, on what she's saying?

Marcel: She met a Catholic, like herself, as I am, so it was a nice link. The synagogue in Groningen is the place to show something about different religions. We have a new educational department in the gallery of the synagogue. It's called 'Cool in Schul'. It's for students, and we show traditions of Judaism and we also compare Jewish tradition with Christian tradition and Islamic tradition. We explain about the similarities between halal and kosher, for example, about the position of women in Judaism and women in Islam. So we try to give attention to the three most important religions: Judaism, Christianity and Islam. So this is perfect for us.

David: Last question. My question is, the sentences in the books, is it possible to erase them again?

Francesca: No.

Marcel: No, they're in there forever.

Francesca: They're there forever. Until the ink disappears.

David: Okay, that's not a problem for you?

Marcel: No, the work isn't permanent. But it's hanging in the synagogue until next Wednesday. Come and visit the synagogue and see her work.



THE CONVERSION OF JIE JIE: a life- changing artistic act

JIE JIE PAN

David: You're a first-year student at Minerva Art Academy. And you have a very special project, I think, because you are the artwork. You are the maker and the representative of the Groninger Mosque. Can you tell us something about that? You represent many roles at the same time. You are a first-year student, so you're taking on quite a project. Where is the work of art? And especially, what

is the work of art? I already said you have it in you too, but what is it?

Jie Jie: Well, first we got the assignment about art exchange and we had to involve an institution. So I thought to myself, who would I like to involve? And I was thinking about faith a little already, but I didn't really feel the urge to find out a great deal more about Islam. But it did appeal to me very much to involve the Groninger Mosque in the project. So I just went there and met a young man who was really totally opposed to the idea. He thought the mosque was not a museum, although I could leave some art behind there. Art and Islam are totally separated, had nothing to do with each other. I said, 'And what about Islamic art?' That's not really something, yes, it's very comprehensive, and it's also more around cultures than religion itself. So at a certain point I got a bit stuck. I thought, what should I exchange with them? Meanwhile, I started talking with the people there and I started doing more research into Islam itself, for me personally. And I was doing this so intensively, and at a certain point I became so convinced of the religion really, that I converted to it.

David: And out comes this photograph. Is this the moment you became a Muslim?

Jie Jie: Yes.

David: Okay, you are being embraced. This is the ritual. Now I know that it is not allowed to show images in a mosque, but they're also not allowed to be taken. So, then this is not in a mosque, I think.

Jie Jie: I know that if you want to create something, for example paint or draw living beings, that it is not allowed, because then you are challenging God. I read something about that in the news, there's a statue of a moose and then there was a real moose, and it sort of walked around it because it thought there was a real moose. That kind of thing. And once there was a dog and it waited in front of a statue of a man, say, who was sitting, but it was a statue. He had a stick and he sat there and waited until the man would throw it, but of course that was not going to happen.

David: No, precisely. So that is the reason that they have problems with that.

Jie Jie: Yes, that you are challenging [God] with this.

David: Yes, that is obvious. You had to take action to arrive at an exchange. And then you had the idea to convert and become a Muslim. I think that is a pretty radical idea. Did you have this for a longer period of time? Or did it come about through this project with Jonas?

Jie Jie: As I said, I was getting a little bit stuck in the project. Perhaps also because I am a first-year student that I'm not yet capable of thinking so clearly and freely. But after my conversion I still thought that I was getting stuck. But then I was having dinner with friends who are sitting there, Jan and Astrid, and I had a discussion with them and I said, 'Yes, I'm just not managing, I think it is so hard.' And then they said, 'In a way, you've already done it.

You have surrendered yourself and in a way

exchanged yourself.' And I think, yes. In a way that is a kind of permanent exchange.

David: You say that as a first-year you cannot think so clearly and freely, while I could say, I think it is an example of clear and free thinking, because you have converted to another belief, within the framework of an art education. Or isn't it within the framework of an art project or art education that you did this?

Jie Jie: It is not for the project that I thought: I'm going to convert now. But it was for the project that I went to the mosque to try to involve them and this is how I came into contact more with Islam. And I started emailing with this guy quite a lot to talk, and I visited even more often. So it really came about because of this a little.

David: But what I now understand from you, Jie Jie, is that the idea to do this was something you had for a longer period of time. And that it took place a little sooner now because of the visit to the mosque within that project, through the project you did, the Academy of the People.

Jie Jie: Yes, because I already believed in God. Because in the Chinese culture we eat quite a lot of pork, so now I am really stuck between the Dutch culture, the Chinese culture and Islam. So, when I did not really feel the urge yet to be involved in Islam and to research it, then I found my temple, say, rather okay. But once I got in touch with it more, it sort of went that way of its own accord.

David: You've been a Muslim for two weeks

now. How do you like it, can you say something about this? Would you like to say something about it?

Jie Jie: Yes, a lot of change. Your life changes radically. Also because I'm in art education and I was painting a lot of portraits, made sculptures, and all of that I can no longer do. When I first heard that, I thought, oh, but can I not just, I don't know, say that I can still do this but not with the thought that I am challenging. And then I was given an assignment, I had a magazine image of a girl, I already had this before my conversion, and I thought, I am just going to paint. At a certain point she was half finished, this small child, and then I thought she was very creepy. And I thought, yes, I'm just not going to do this anymore. And then I looked up a little bit more about it and then I discovered, that, yes, you are challenging, and this is not allowed. And then there was a moment that I no longer wanted to do it myself, and I think that that is just really important. Not that you do something because you have to, but because you want to yourself.

David: Has that changed during these two weeks?

Jie Jie: I think that's what I'm saying now, but the discussions with my parents and family and such, they are quite difficult. At first they said, 'You should do what makes you happy.' But now it has become, 'Yes, you should not become too extreme. You can still eat pork with us.' That kind of thing. And also the praying which is in the middle of the night, at three

a.m., so before sunrise, there is also a prayer, and I find this really, really hard.

David: I understand that. Your daily rituals have been turned upside down.

Jonas: Okay, the final question is for you, and it is also the most difficult question, but try to give a brief answer. You did this within an artistic context, where art and life merge completely, how do you feel about this? Are you feeling something now? It may be a very decadent question, but do you also feel like a work of art now?

Jie Jie: Yes, that is quite tricky, because I think yes, on the one hand, because I present myself that way now and that is my attitude, and it was my own idea to, well not entirely my own, but eventually, that I exchanged myself, and that is what came of it. But I also told someone of the mosque about it, because in a way I feel that it may be disrespectful, to say, talk about it this way. That people might think, as you just said, that I converted because of the project, because that is not the case.

David: Okay, that's a clear answer. We have to stop now, Jie Jie. Even if we could talk about this for a long time. I thank you very much.

'My BIGGEST CHALLENGE was making the process of the exchange visible'



ELKE

David: The lady who's been taking photographs all evening and is now being photographed herself. What is that like, to have your picture taken? Because now you are in front of the camera, and not behind it.

Elke: Yes, exactly, this is new.

David: Yes, this is new, isn't it? I can tell by looking at you. You photographed this entire

project. You study design at Minerva Art Academy and are now a second-year student, I think? Can you tell me, because we discussed this before, in a way you are the objective eye of the whole process, of all the people you are the one who has the greatest distance to the project. You recorded it all in a documentary way. In a way, you really made a documentary about it. Can you tell us something about your findings concerning this project?

Elke: All right. I thought this was just a really interesting project. That's why I signed up for it. But eventually we arrived at the idea of an art exchange. And then I thought, well, all right, I don't really feel I am an artist. I could go and make something, but that is really outside my scope. It struck me as an interesting idea to further develop photography, and to take pictures of all of the projects. Then my next thought was, crikey, I have to take pictures of all the projects. How do I do that and how will it go? But it really became quite a wonderful enterprise, because I went to all the projects and I've been able to put my own twist on them, on how I should record it all.

David: Tell us something about this twist.

Elke: Well, all right. Here's the police station, before that the school, the insects, Ikea. They're all completely different. For example, Ikea, that was a one-sided project. It really came only from Jimi and could not really be photographed, so these photographs are much more detached. The project with the insects was at someone's house, that was

really a personal collection. So you are much more in their personal environment. And really with the school, it was about the voting process. The children were protected, so all the children remained invisible. So that was really wonderful to deal with.

David: So that really means that you as a designer or as a photographer in society, that you develop a different kind of way of taking photographs in each place. Is that what you learned the most from this period?

Elke: Without a doubt. At first I thought, well, all right, I have an idea of how this works, from which direction I want to approach it. But then you end up in a situation and it's quite different from what you expected. So then you act intuitively. And looking back, when you make your selection, somehow it makes sense. But, I say this about myself, other people would need to confirm this. But well, it was really great fun. To have to work in a certain way and also to get inspiration from all these works. Because now I was semi - to a small degree - involved in everything, and how all that interaction went, that was really quite wonderful.

David: And has this developed your design, your way of looking, as it were? I mean that you see how the different artists went into society and intervened there?

Elke: Yes, in any case the artist's take. It is of course a very different way of designing, that's something I understood about this project earlier. These collaborations and

inspiring each other, that is something I always enjoy a lot. But really this is also visual communication from a graphic designer, how do I get images of this entire project and the special atmosphere and the collaborations into three or five photographs? How this becomes visible in its entirety. And you do this with graphic design, there you also want to communicate an idea. And that really happened here as well, but with an entirely different medium.

David: We see all these photographs here now, but will there be a presentation as well?

Elke: Yes, there will be a publication, also with images of this evening, but also of all of these projects. In September, I think.

David: Okay, so that will be your publication.

Elke: Yes, I will be in Australia by then.

David: So it will be presented here and you will be present from a distance?

Elke: Exactly, it will be sent to me.

David: I think we have to stop now. Do you have anything else you would like to tell?

Elke: No.

David: You took some incredibly beautiful photographs, and have been taking pictures very zealously all evening, so you have a great commitment to the project. Elke, thank you very much. As you may understand, the evening has come to an end. I don't know, would Jonas like to say some concluding words? I thank you very much for being here. The artists, the guests, thank you for being here.

Jonas: And thank you David.



Art exchange between Jimi Kleinbruinink,
Pierre Carrière and Ikea

COUNTERBALANCING MASS PRODUCTION

*“What makes art different is
that you do what you want to
do, despite your fears. Go out
into the world. Be a pioneer.”*







Interview with **Jimi Kleinbruinink**, Fine Arts student
at Minerva Art Academy

*‘One way or another **POLITICAL ASPECTS** do tend to seep into your work’*

Jimi Kleinbruinink studied Fine Arts at Minerva Art Academy. He graduated in 2013, and is currently working as a sculptor in Groningen. He joined the Academy of the People project because Jonas Staal's work appealed to him, even if Jonas has an intellectual approach which is quite different to that of Jimi Kleinbruinink. He made three little sculptures and chose Ikea as a collaborating partner, because he thought they didn't have much in common, although it never really became a collaboration.

What strategy did you choose for the art exchange?

I placed three little sculptures in the showrooms of Ikea. Surreptitiously, because they didn't want to cooperate. In an organisation such as Ikea it's not that easy to get to talk to the director, so I'd written a letter. And someone I know told me they weren't interested in cooperating. Perhaps I would have succeeded if I'd handled it differently. Perhaps I should have been more political. I had chosen Ikea as an organisation because they are directly

opposite to what I do. Making products in large quantities and selling them. And if it doesn't sell, they stop the production. I make things that originate from the moment, often also from the material I have at that moment, and often there's only the original. So I had placed my little sculptures in the showrooms, without Ikea knowing about it. I had attached a price tag to them of €2.99 with a barcode I had copied. But I don't believe they sold, because Ikea staff got to them first. Although one of my sculptures managed to stay in the store for a week and a half.

What did the Academy of the People project mean to you? And has it influenced your artistic practice?

I ended up in Jonas Staal's project in my graduation year. I already knew his work and it appealed to me. One of my mentors encouraged me to join and I also thought

that it might bring deeper layers into my work. During the meetings for the project, Jonas told us how hard he had worked on trying to function in the gallery world, until he decided to take an entirely different approach and to start working more politically. He also did the project World Summit in Berlin, for example, where ‘terrorists’ were given the floor. People who usually never get to speak in public and that you therefore never hear. Something like that is possible in the arts. Art is an area in which you can test something without it having consequences in reality - a quote from Brian Eno. You can try everything here. In that sense this project did get me thinking.

Has it changed your opinion about what you can achieve with art?

As far as I’m concerned, that question has not really been answered yet. And which role the political aspect plays in this, I’m not entirely sure about either. I see politics as convincing the other person, and I don’t know whether art can do this, whether art can communicate a concept. And if it does, has it not become political?

How did the collaboration with the partner organisation go?

Bringing about an exchange with Ikea was not going to happen, and through the Academy of the People meetings I got in touch with Pierre Carrière. He was writing a book about the rose, a print sold by Ikea, and one of their bestselling products of all time. He was interviewing people who have that print on their wall, the personal story they had with this. And this sometimes resulted in very remarkable stories. In a sense, his work was the reverse movement of what Ikea does. They make things on a large scale, rather anonymously, but through his interviews Pierre made them into very personal pieces.

What was the value of this project to you as an artist?

My work has always had political aspects, or at any rate, people, my teachers, saw political aspects in my work. There was a time that I wanted to expand on that, but I have since let it go. I work more with my own imagination now. And as far as I’m concerned that is what makes art different: that despite your own fears, you do what you want to do. Go out into the world, be a pioneer. Without wanting to be complimented for it. I think that that has become a little clearer for me through this project.

So you have let go of the political entirely?

I’m not completely sure. For my graduation exam I made a table with toy houses. For months I scoured second-hand shops and bought toy houses. Then I cut them into little pieces and built new buildings with them. They looked rather rough and ruin-like. My idea was that they were bad toys. Houses as a kind of cornerstone of society, the social values that children are confronted with immediately, the messages that are hidden in a lot of toys. All those things you are encouraged to collect, for example, children think that’s quite normal. ‘Collect them all!’ those kind of lines. But, of course, you don’t have to. And then you have all those people producing all that stuff you have to collect. We could all work a lot less hard if we didn’t do that kind of thing, because it’s all bullshit. And then you have a guy like Prime Minister Rutte who says some people are cutting corners and are not working hard enough. Why? They simply choose to do things in a different way. So perhaps the political is seeping into my work anyway. One way or another, it does become part of what I do.



Interview **Pierre Carrière**, writer of the book
'In de ban van de roos'

*'Students could easily
have hung up a painting
somewhere, but **EVERYONE
FOLLOWED HIS OR
HER OWN PERSONAL
STRATEGY**'*

Pierre Carrière is the writer of the book 'In de ban van de roos' about a popular print which for many years was a bestseller in Ikea stores. And it was this book which brought him into contact with Jimi Kleinbruinink who was trying to bring about an art exchange with Ikea for the Academy of the People project. The exchange did not quite go to plan, and one of Jimi's teachers told him about a person he knew who was writing a book about the rose from Ikea. 'You might put in the rose as the exchange,' the teacher proposed. And so Jimi contacted Pierre Carrière, writer and former copywriter for various advertising agencies in Groningen. The project intrigued Pierre and he decided to get involved.

What was your role in the Academy of the People project?

Our situation was a little bit different from that of most other collaborations in the project. I got involved at quite a late stage, because the collaboration between Jimi Kleinbruinink and Ikea wasn't happening. When Jimi didn't manage to get in touch

with Ikea, he decided to put his sculptures in the Ikea store without Ikea knowing and made a website for it. At the bottom of the little sculptures he put an email address which people could email if they had found the sculpture or bought it. But that didn't turn out quite as expected, and when it had been a while before any reaction to the sculptures came in, he decided on a different strategy. A teacher told him about a writer who was working on a book about Ikea's rose print, and this is how it came about that we became partners in the project.

Can you say something about the strategy you chose and carried out for the exchange?

I thought Academy of the People was a first-class idea. Especially because of the way the students had approached it. I have to admit that my expectations were not very high to begin with, but after I saw the presentation in the Groninger Museum, I left the building absolutely flabbergasted.

I was especially impressed with how the students had dealt with it and was surprised about the good outcomes. Sometimes concepts can remain rather foggy, even after they have been executed, but this concept was rock-solid. What could easily have happened is that students would have hung up a painting somewhere, but everyone followed his or her own personal strategy. Like the girl who saw herself as a kind of artwork after she had converted and had become a Muslim. Or the girl who had the nerve to write down texts from other holy books in the synagogue. And, perhaps my favourite, the guy who turned stolen objects into a work of art in the police station. I am not yet aware whether it has influenced my writing, but it is quite possible that it has had an effect on my way of thinking. Who knows, in three years' time I will write a book and suddenly realise that I took the same approach as the guy who did the exchange with the police station. Jimi did it a little bit differently, in the sense that his sculptures already existed. He put his own stuff between Ikea stuff.

Has it changed your ideas about art or about what the effect of art can be?

I know you can change things with art. And I think that that is what happened here as well. It is especially to do with looking at things in a different way. Take the stolen objects, for example. If that young man had brought them into the police station as stolen goods, they would have looked at the situation quite differently. He would have been treated like a criminal and punished. Now, as an installation with police tape around it, the officers looked at it in a new way and he was treated as an artist.

Has Ikea responded to your book about the rose? What did they think of it?

Yes, they did react. We even tried to sell the book in Ikea, and that would have been no

problem as far as Ikea was concerned. What stopped it was the fact that the rose wasn't sold in the stores anymore. But their reaction was quite positive. I handed the first copy of the book to the Ikea Groningen store manager, in the local bookshop. He said he was very pleased with the book, because it gave him such a clear view of his customers.

What was the value of this project to you as an artist?

It did provide me with new insights. When I got the idea to interview people who had the print of the rose hanging in their house, I thought they would all be the same people with the same Ikea interiors. So at first we had planned no more than six interviews. But that turned out quite differently. The stories were very surprising and sometimes also very personal. I can tell you that it resulted in some very special things. What I have tried to do with this book is, in a certain sense, quite the opposite of what Ikea does. They make things on a large scale, quite anonymous, but because of these interviews it became quite small again and very personal.

Is there anything else you would like to say about the project?

Looking back, I must say I was really surprised about the quality of Academy of the People. A few very special outcomes surfaced because of it and they certainly influenced my way of thinking. I did think it was a bit of a pity that the art wasn't hung in one of the museum's large exhibition rooms, but that we were in a conference room. A nice conference room, certainly, but different nonetheless. I had tried to imagine how we could have hung a great many copies of the rose print on a bright green wall, for example, and how beautiful that would have looked. But perhaps that was a little too much for the museum.

AN ART EXCHANGE WITH A TWIST

*"I discovered that making
representations of the human figure
was considered God's prerogative."*







Interview with **Jie Jie Pan**, Fine Arts student
at Minerva Art Academy

THE CONVERSION OF JIE JIE: *a life-changing artistic act*

What started as artistic research as part of Academy of the People, for Jie Jie Pan inadvertently turned out to be an action which had a great impact on her daily life. For her art exchange, Jie Jie chose to contact the Muslim community. A mosque seemed to her to be the most likely place to start a conversation with Muslims and to present her ideas to them.

How did your choice come about, to seek an exchange with a mosque?

The media do not always give a positive impression of Muslims. I was curious and wanted to show another side to Muslims, the side which would be proven by my experiences.

How did you do this?

I cycled to the mosque. There I found a guy who was praying and with whom I got to talk. At first he was not that enthusiastic about my idea at all and did not feel like doing an art exchange. But the conversation took such a turn that my interest in Islam was strengthened. We exchanged email addresses and had more discussions. During our contact my interest in Islam developed from a passive one into an active one. And eventually this led to my conversion to Islam.

A very different outcome than you envisaged at the start of the project. How did this continue?

The guy brought me into contact with a number of other people, Muslims who might be able to help me find out more. During our discussions I discovered that there are Muslims who think you should not make representations of the human figure, that creation is God's prerogative. Figurative could be another matter. I don't know whether all Muslims feel this way about it. One of the people I had been brought into contact with was active in the field of calligraphy. I looked into whether this might be of use to me, but it turned out it wasn't. Other contacts didn't really yield any results either.

So, it looked as if the art exchange wasn't going to happen, but by this time you had become a Muslim yourself. How did this conversion come about?

At first it was a result of the research and the conversations I had been having with Muslims. It may seem like a very radical choice, but for me at the time it made a lot of sense.

Religion had played a part in my upbringing, but only a small part. Yet I have always had a focus on something higher. For it is now as if different cultures or religions are coming together, or merging as it were.

How did your conversion influence the art project?

Eventually, I decided to consider my conversion to be the work of art. As a Muslim I took on the role of representative of the Islamic community, while at the same time I was Minerva Art Academy student who initiated the exchange. With this, I fulfilled two roles: that of the artist and that of the partner institute.

What did your special experience, which was the result of this project, teach you about your own artistic role?

The conversion was more than an artistic act, and actually it transcends art. For me it also feels like a one-of-a-kind act. It just 'happened' to turn out this way, which is also the reason that at first I didn't really feel I was the owner of the artwork. Usually my work is much more physical, so this was quite new to me.

But the artistic act was a result of your own research. You made your own choices in that process, didn't you?

That's right, even though at the moment for me they were also choices from the heart. Later, in the conversations with Jonas Staal at the Groninger Museum, I discovered that people thought what I did was very special. Art and life came together in my project. This gave me a feeling of pride, but at the same time I felt it was hard to underpin my choices.

There was a lot of interest in the way you dealt with the project, also from the media. What did this teach you?

During the public dialogues in the museum

I had a heart-to-heart with David Strobant, in which I told him of my experiences. My story was picked up by a journalist, who was apparently in the hall; after which an article appeared on the Internet and Radio 1 called me. Because I had shared very personal things, I was quite bothered by it. Jonas Staal, who supervised the project as an artist, protected me from this and made sure the story did not get a life of its own. The extended article and the reactions of the readers are now very hard to find on the Internet. Afterwards, I felt very naïve. I am more aware now of what consequences an act like this can have.

What did the community at the mosque think of your artwork?

My conversion was of course seen as a positive thing and people were very supportive to me in my search. But the way I handled the project itself, I eventually did outside of the mosque. I was a little apprehensive about telling them that the conversion itself had become the work of art, because I was afraid that they might think I didn't take my conversion very seriously. I also felt that we were two separate worlds, the outside world and the Islamic community, with the work of art in between. I felt I had to protect the Muslim community, especially because of the sometimes rather negative tone the media takes towards the Muslim community.

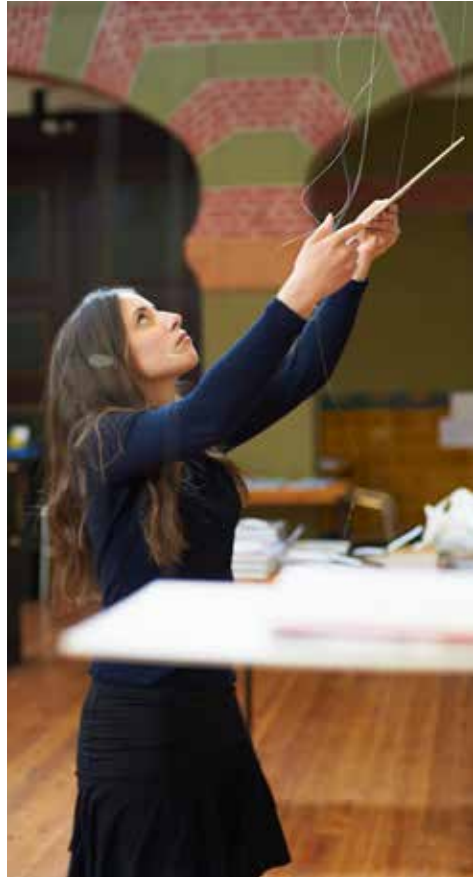
Is the project still relevant to you as an artist, and if so, how?

For me personally, it was a very special project because of the consequences it had for my own life, of course. But also for the way I work as an artist. I thought it was a very important project, that will in fact continue to have an influence on what I do and think as an artist, and which I should never forget. I have to and I want to make sure that this happens myself.

Art exchange between Francesca Lai
and the Groninger synagogue

FLOATING TREASURE CHESTS

*“To me religious books were like
magical objects, filled with scary,
beautiful and powerful things.”*





Interview with **Francesca Lai**, Fine Arts student
at Minerva Art Academy



'I wanted to show the
SIMILARITIES IN
RELIGIONS, which are
so often hidden to us'

Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

Matthew 6:25-34

'It was really by chance that I became part of Academy of the People. I would never have done it for myself,' says Francesca Lai, Fine Arts student at Minerva Art Academy. 'It was about taking a risk. I was in a situation where I was wondering about my work in a bigger context than myself, as all artists do. Am I making a difference with my work, does it have social relevance, things like that. And this project was about politics. Politics has the air of being important, and I was wondering if political art has a more direct impact on society or whether it would make more of a difference than other art forms. Even though now, after the project, I don't think that anymore. It's not that I think that politics in art is not important, it's more that I found out during the project that when I deal with big social issues I always look for a way to approach it through poetry, so that my socio-political context is always filtered by a poetic language which speaks more to the individual, but which also has a value.'

Normally I work alone, and the intimacy of loneliness became my concept, so it was a real challenge to step out of that 'shell' and approach the outside world in such a direct way. I was curious to investigate how I, as an artist and as a person, could deal with this confrontation and what it would bring in terms of impact and change. And I was really surprised. About the way of working and also about how other people are willing to help you.

For my art exchange, I chose the synagogue in the Folkingestraat in Groningen. I'm from Italy, so I grew up in a Catholic country, and knew nothing about Jewish culture. It was a most unknown thing to me.

So I went there, not knowing quite what to expect and I took a tour of the synagogue. Now, this synagogue is a bit different. It is divided into two parts, one is the holy part and one is used as an exhibition space. I was looking for friction, but it turned out to be very open to artists. With religion you always have to be a bit careful, and I thought my work would be an intrusion. But proposing the project was not at all hard. Which is not to say the project didn't have its challenges; the project itself was quite challenging. The easy part was that the synagogue was very welcoming and open to art initiatives, so I didn't have to fight for my ideas. This gave me the confidence to make a big installation and to literally play with the books.

How I came up with the idea of the books has to do with my history with religious books. I was always fascinated by religious books, by the richness of their images. To me they look like magical objects, like twinkling treasure chests, filled with scary, beautiful and powerful things. I used to collect them from second-hand bookshops. I do not practice a religion myself, but I was interested in the images the words suggest. So I started reading the books I had, some fifty books about seven different religions. The Bible to begin with; and the Quran; and the teachings of Buddha, and many more. And as I was reading, what struck me were the more existential things in the books. The philosophical truths that apply to everyone, without mentioning God specifically. I found similarities in these books. And then the idea came to me that I wanted to point out these similarities. I took sentences and started collecting them and mixing them up. I took a sentence from the Bible and wrote it on the opened pages of the Quran with a UV-light pen. And I took a sentence from the Quran and wrote it on the gospels of the Buddha. These sentences

were invisible to the naked eye. With this, I wanted to illustrate how the similarities in religion are so often invisible to us. I wrote the sentences on the pages of the books and I spread the books throughout the synagogue, open and hanging on little wooden shelves. People were able to use a special UV-light torch to make the sentences visible. The way I built the installation was also religious, in the sense that there was light to make things appear. And the holy books were on a higher level. I wanted people to reflect on the beauty and the meaning of the sentences by taking them out of their context.'

Francesca Lai is from Italy and started as an exchange student at Minerva Art Academy, where she studied Fine Arts. The original idea was to stay for six months, but that became a year, and then two years. She is now in her third year in the Netherlands. She feels there is a great contrast between art education in Italy and in the Netherlands and that she had to learn a lot when she came here. Francesca: "What is especially different here is that sharing your work is important and analysing it as well. Coming to Minerva taught me how to think and to reflect on my own and other people's work and to develop a greater degree of consciousness. And the Academy of the People project taught me to step out of my comfort zone and work with other people. To push the limits, to make something different. It was a good experience."

What was funny was what we got in exchange for our work. Mostly people gave us paintings. The synagogue gave me a painting of a menorah and I know of quite a few other students who got paintings as well. Which says a lot really. It shows the ideas people have about art. That many people still think of art as being a painting, when really it is so much more.



Interview with **Marcel Wichers**, director of the Synagogue Groningen

‘I would like the synagogue TO GIVE A WIDER EXPRESSION to religious feelings’

For her part in the Academy of the People project Francesca Lai, Fine Arts student at Minerva Art Academy, chose an art exchange with the Synagogue Groningen. For which she decided to use the religious books that she had been collecting for a while. She started reading them, the Bible, the Quran, the teachings of the Buddha, and many more. She was struck by the existential, philosophical truths in the books, which the different faiths all seemed to have in common. She decided that she wanted to point out these similarities and started collecting sentences. She wrote a sentence from the Bible in the Quran with a UV-pen; and she wrote a sentence from the Quran onto Buddhist scriptures. They were invisible to the naked eye, and in doing so she wanted to illustrate that similarities in religions are often invisible to us.

Marcel Wichers: ‘Francesca thought the texts might give problems, because Christian texts are often not very welcome in a synagogue. Traditionally Christianity is often seen as a threat, more so than Islam. But as far as I was concerned the project fitted very well in this spot. I think the synagogue should give a wider expression to religious feelings, and the basic idea behind Francesca’s project is that religions should have more understanding for each other. The scriptures of the different faiths appear to have many parallels. That was one of the aspects that really appealed to me in this project. Another aspect was that

it concerned modern art. My interest in art dates further back, because I also work at the Groninger Museum as a guide and have been an art critic for the university newspaper (the UK) for many years.’

Wichers did not take his decision in concurrence with the synagogue’s board of governors. He had a lot of faith in the project, and also in the idea that the Jewish community would be able to handle the texts. And indeed, it did not result in any conflict, perhaps also because by coincidence hardly anyone of the community saw them. ‘The exhibition took place during the three

‘My role in Francesca Lai’s project was essentially a facilitating one. Making it possible, as it were,’ says Marcel Wichers, director of the Synagogue Groningen. ‘At the beginning, Francesca had a few doubts herself. She thought her idea might lead to frictions. And it very easily could have.’

summer months when there are no services in the synagogue,’ Marcel Wichers says. ‘But to be honest, I don’t think it would have led to any big problems. Most people who come here are rather more open-minded than that.’

And the reactions of the visitors who did see the exhibition were all very positive. ‘People were full of admiration for the project. And it did look very beautiful. It also gave me ideas for using the space in the synagogue in a better way, because the books had been placed on little wooden shelves and they were attached to the light grid. This way they could hang freely in the space and people had to manoeuvre around them.’

Does Marcel Wichers think that this could be a way to change things in society through art? Wichers: ‘I don’t know whether this specific project brought that about, because really I already believed this. For example, I once visited an exhibition where every visitor had to put on a burka upon entering. Because everyone has a prejudice about wearing burkas, but no one knows what it’s really like. Art certainly has the power to show us things with different eyes. And this project also made that clear. Francesca’s project was the first in this synagogue, but I hope many more will

follow. I’m currently working on other art projects for this space. Right now we have comic strips by a young artist who is poking fun at Jewish life, and we are also working on organising pop concerts. What we would really like is to attract young people and be a living and lively part of society. Francesca’s project certainly contributed to this.’

‘Do you have something for me?’ Francesca Lai asked when she had set up her installation in the synagogue. Marcel Wichers thought about this for a moment. Perhaps a Torah scroll or a menorah might be interesting for the art exchange. But then he remembered a painting the synagogue had by Alian Brouwer. ‘Alian worked here in Groningen, and passed away a few years ago from cancer. The painting I chose for the art exchange is one she made especially for the synagogue. I think it would have given Alian great pleasure to have a painting in the Groninger Museum. So that is what I gave Francesca, so it could be exhibited there.’

Art exchange between Laikuen Chan
and Edwoud van der Ploeg

AUTONOMOUS COLLECTORS

*“Our drive for collecting
was very similar, even if
gloves and insects are not.”*







Interview with **Laikuen Chan**, Fine Arts student
at Minerva Art Academy

‘This project
EMPOWERED ME,
it changed my point of
view’

For the Academy of the People art exchange, second-year Minerva Art Academy student Laikuen Chan gave her exchange partner a glove print and in return he submitted a box of exotic insects.

How did this exchange come about?

‘It all began with a workshop. I attended a workshop by Jonas Staal and I found this so inspiring that I decided to join the Academy of the People project. I had been collecting gloves ever since I came to the Netherlands. I’m from Malaysia and a thing such as a glove simply does not exist there. I was intrigued by these objects that I found in the street, and there were quite a lot of them too. I thought it was a pity they were just lying in the street. Perfectly fine gloves, just with one missing. So I started collecting them and putting them into artworks. I wanted to use these as part of the exchange and I was looking for a partner who would be into taxidermy, stuffed animals. I didn’t manage to find someone to work with, until a friend told me about a friend who had a stuffed stone marten. That’s how I met Ewoud. And when he invited me to his house, I discovered that the stone marten might not be the most interesting thing there. He collected insects and they were everywhere. Dead insects, live insects, in beautiful glass boxes and terraria, from Asia, Africa. Since it turned out that this was his big interest, I changed my idea and we put the insects into the exchange.

How would you describe your role in the exchange?

Even though Ewoud and I collect completely different things for different purposes, I thought the similarity was that we are both collectors. His insects are a real passion for him, and it is a drive which is something from within. And that is what being an autonomous artist is all about as well, of course. We are taught at the academy to be autonomous: to do everything from your own drive. And so it is for me and my glove collection, that is a passion. Our drive was very similar, so I wondered if I could bridge the gap between the collections. I would say that, in that sense, my role was one of communicator.

Can you say something about the strategy you chose and performed in the exchange?

I tried to break out of our spheres, his being scientific and mine artistic, and let the information complement each other.

What does the Academy of the People project mean to you? At the time and now when you look back on it? How has it influenced your artistic practice?

For me it offered a great opportunity to work with different people, and also that you had to really engage with people. We talked about how artists can change the world and be real contributors, for example. Not just participate in a passive way, but have an active role. For example in Malaysia, where I come from, there is a group of artists who go into the community and engage with people. They set up projects and involve people, children, older people and everyone else. It changes things. How they work together, how they see each other. In Malaysia, trash is a real problem and this group of artists developed an awareness programme about it. You see that it has an effect in the world. And I'm talking about small things here, not about large-scale

changes. But these little things can be very important; tiny things can also change the world and they should be cherished.

Has it changed or influenced your opinion about art or about what art can achieve?

Yes it has. I used to have a negative association with art and artists, even though I am an artist myself. It was also my own insecurity. I thought that art was useless in society. So what attracted me in this project was the political aspect, because everything is political. And I asked myself: how can you change things in society through art? And I discovered that this project empowered me, it changed my point of view. It was so very different from what people think about art in Malaysia. I discovered that as an artist you can help change the world. You can change things through active participation. In that sense, I believe that the role of artists has changed. Artists can be active facilitators and organisers as well.

How was the cooperation with your partner? How do you think he looked upon the exchange? What is this based upon?

It went quite well. I think perhaps that our cooperation was a bit different than that of the students who worked with an organisation, but we worked together well. I think Ewoud was quite amused by the whole thing. He thought it was very interesting.

What is the value of the project for you as an artist?

My own experience in this project was the most valuable thing for me. Building up my experience as a working artist. To not just work in a school context, but in the outside world and to get an experience of how things could work there. That was the part I liked best, that it was not in a school framework, but outside of it. It allowed us to test our own relevance in the outside world.

THE STORY BEHIND THE PICTURES

“At a certain point I saw that my style was becoming the connecting element in the photography. I don’t remember exactly how I did this, in a way it just simply happened.”







Interview with **Elke Uijtewaal**, Design student at Minerva Art Academy

‘My BIGGEST CHALLENGE *was making the process of the exchange visible’*

What was your role in the Academy of the People project?

Right from the start, when I heard it was a Jonas Staal project, I was interested. I knew his project ‘New World Summit’, and that really appealed to me. I believe I was also one of the first people who applied. We had several meetings, and quite soon things went in the direction of an art exchange. I don’t really see myself as an artist, I’m a designer. So I was looking for a different role. Because I’m also a photographer and would like to expand that, I applied as a photographer. Partly for myself, to explore whether I was able to do that, so it was quite exciting.

You photographed the whole project, what was your strategy concerning the photography?

My main aim was to make clear how important the process of the exchange was in the whole project. I started by writing down all the details about every exchange, the role of the student and the role of the opposing party. And that was what I wanted to encapsulate in pictures. Some art exchanges didn’t really have an opposing party, such as Ikea, where Jimi put his artwork in the showroom without the company knowing. And the school

was a little different as well. There the art exchange was a workshop where student Irene Sanchez shared her knowledge and the pupils partook in a democratic election. The challenge was to create coherence in the projects through the images. The projects were very diverse, so how do you create a clear connection between them for the viewer? At a certain point I saw that my style was becoming the connecting element in the photography, the atmosphere of the photographs. I don’t remember exactly how I did this, in a way it just simply happened.

Was this different during the concluding meeting?

That concluding meeting was not all that easy for me, because I was a participant and I had to take pictures at the same time. So you participate in a process and at the same time as a photographer you are outside of it a little bit. As a participant I was interviewed on stage about my experiences with the project and my photographs were on display. As a photographer you are excluded in a way. And at the same time you are very aware of where you are going and what you are doing and whether just your being present doesn’t influence the process. I think that this combination of being and an outsider and a participant can best be compared to documentary photography.

What were the challenges you came across?

I think that that had a lot to do with deciding what my own attitude was going to be. You meet different people all the time and different opposing parties. Like Ordina (a professional business) the police station where I was chatting to the curator, and the biologist Ewoud who invited me to his home. My question was, who do I meet and how do I adapt? I also noticed that my attitude on entering a situation made a great difference. If you come in saying: ‘I’m going

to try and take pictures' somehow everyone is aware of your presence. But if you come in and say, I'm the photographer and I'm going to do some work here and you just start, then other people continue their work as well. With Ikea things went a little differently, because I wasn't allowed to take pictures there, so I had to work really fast. It was one of the first jobs in the project and it went like, take out the camera, take a picture and move on. And at the school with the children and the election process I wasn't allowed to take pictures of the children in which they could be recognised. Then you have to think about how you are going to visualize the process.

Is there a favourite for you among the projects?

I have a great affinity with art education, and that is why I really liked the project at the school. The children were very enthusiastic and Irene Sanchez really has a great talent for working with children. They took the whole election process very seriously and often chose things with very surprising motivations. For some children art was a painting, and other children felt this also applied to objects or items which were somewhere in the school and which they liked. And the whole voting process went very professionally as well.

What struck you most in the Academy of the People project?

The way everyone dealt with the project. We started with a big group and eventually the really enthusiastic ones remained. I thought it was a really special project to do with Jonas. In his earlier work he takes up a clear point of view and then he goes for it, without adding nuances. That calls up a lot of reactions in people. But that doesn't interest him, he thinks the art world needs certain impulses at certain moments. And he approaches it in a big way, for example with the New World Summit in Berlin. And

with this project as well, by entering into a collaboration with the Groninger Museum. I thought he was very inspiring. His first lecture lasted something like four hours, and we as Minerva students were not really prepared for this. But it did offer us a very good foundation to continue working with.

What do you think the value of a project like this is?

I think this project was important for the development of the students' and the academy's awareness, about what art is and what it can bring about. Many students were already working with that idea, that art is more than just making work at the academy. There already was engagement. What was important to me is how you do this. And in this case it was a matter of approaching institutions and bringing about a collaboration. I also saw that this project offered people the opportunity to do what they had always wanted to do, such as for example Francesca Lai, who had been working with religious texts for a long time already. And now she visited the synagogue and eventually her work ended up hanging there. That might not have happened otherwise, I think.

Has this project changed your opinion about art or what you can bring about with art?

I already knew that you can bring things about with art, I think Jonas Staal is a very clear example of this. How I would approach it myself, I don't really know yet. I often find it difficult to take that step, to go into society and change things. Because, where do you begin? There are so many things and I wouldn't know where to start. I would like to try as a photographer on other people's projects, because then you are closer to the whole process and this way you can also make processes visible. That would be my way of working on it.

CENTRE OF APPLIED RESEARCH and INNOVATION ART & SOCIETY

The research group Image in Context is part of the Centre of Applied Research and Innovation Art & Society (Hanze University of Applied Sciences), which also includes the research groups Lifelong Learning in Music and Art & Sustainability. The research centre is where the School of Performing Arts (Prince Claus Conservatoire and Dance Academy Lucia Marthas) and the School of Fine Arts, Design & Pop Culture MINERVA, combine their practice-based research. The research groups conduct research into innovation in art, design and music in connection with changes in society. The objective is to prepare artists, designers and musicians as well as possible for their critical, creative and innovative role in society. The outcomes of the research are used to renew both the professional practice and the curricula of the schools.

RESEARCH GROUPS

Image in Context

Professor: *Dr. Anke Coumans*

Art & Sustainability

vacancy, temporary *professor Anke Coumans*

Lifelong Learning in Music

Professor of Lifelong Learning in Music: *Dr. Rineke Smilde*

Professor of New Audiences: *Dr. Evert Bisschop Boele*